Paradox and Unionist Identity

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Declaration

I hereby declare that with effect from the date on which the thesis is deposited in Ulster University Doctoral College, I permit

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Summary

Unionism in Ulster is often considered to be paradoxical and paradox is commonly thought to make its politics radically incoherent. From this perspective, Unionists are simultaneously too British and not British enough, a perspective which lends itself to the explanatory categories 'crisis of identity' or 'false consciousness'. The most celebrated formulation of paradox can be found in the title of Miller's 1978 book *Queen's Rebels* in which the contrast between formal allegiance and actual experience in Unionist politics is starkly asserted. This thesis explores systematically the notion of paradox in Unionist identity. Part One of the thesis – 'Identifying Paradox' – considers academic understanding of identity. This section examines how both Britishness and Unionism have been understood in terms of their respective paradoxes. Attention is then focused on the synthesis of Unionist Britishness in Northern Ireland and it is argued that the conceptual framework of elective affinity can be deployed effectively to contain and to explain the supposed radical incoherence of Unionist identity – a paradox resolving paradoxes. Part Two of the thesis – 'Investigating Paradox' - tests that conceptual framework on *Ulster* Unionist identity in a period of constitutional and political uncertainty in the United Kingdom, beginning with the 2014 Scottish independence referendum and ending with the 2016 European referendum and its aftermath. Semi-structured interviews with 34 Unionist politicians were conducted between 2015 and 2016 and their responses to questions on identity, the Union, Europe and the 'narrative' of Unionist Britishness are framed in terms of the paradoxes set out in Part One. Part Three of the thesis summarises the responses and concludes that the negative interpretation of Unionist paradox – especially the 'crisis of identity' trope - is misconceived. A much more positive reading of paradox is possible, one which shows that the paradoxes of Unionist Britishness are central and not marginal, as Miller thought, to politics in the United Kingdom.

Part One

Identifying Paradox

Chapter One

Introduction

1.1: Introduction:

There is a something of a paradox in unionist identity which can be considered in terms of the distinctiveness, yet also the representativeness, of British identity within the context of Northern Ireland during a time of constitutional unrest across the whole of the United Kingdom. It is this concept of British identity in Northern Ireland and its ability to be perceived as both shared and separate from that of the rest of the United Kingdom that forms the basis of this thesis. What differentiates this research from others is that it observes identity in Northern Ireland at a time when Northern Ireland is now more central to British politics due to events such as the 2016 European referendum and the Conservative/Democratic Unionist Party deal following the 2017 snap Westminster Election. When it comes to issues of identity, nationhood and the future of the United Kingdom, Northern Ireland is no longer on the periphery of these questions. Now the Ulster Question is once again a core component of the British Question, a tripartite theoretical approach of interdisciplinary theories will be used to examine and observe the often paradoxical nature of Northern Irish Unionists, along with providing a way of analysing traditional anti-Unionist critiques. This is especially relevant to arguments surrounding the perceived Britishness of both Northern Ireland in general and of Unionism in particular (see for example Walker, 2004; Hennessey, 1996; Southern, 2007). The concept of elective affinity (Goethe, [1809] 1966) will be used throughout the thesis as a framework through which to connect the paradoxical aspects of British identity within *Ulster* Unionism (referring within this thesis to Unionism within a particular geographical location within the United Kingdom). Whilst these concepts are being introduced in this chapter, they will be explored in greater depth throughout the thesis.

1.2: Background to the research

To establish the conceptual backbone for the research, a two part literature review was undertaken to look at both British identity and *Ulster* Unionism. Whilst this is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Two and Chapter Three, it may be helpful to provide a brief synopsis of the research undertaken surrounding these areas. This will provide the context to the theoretical frameworks and concepts which have been introduced within this chapter.

Historically, the relationship between *Ulster* Unionism and the rest of the United Kingdom was most notably shaped by the Ulster Covenant of 1912. This was as a result of the resistance to Irish Home Rule within Ulster (Powell, 2002: 84; Hennessey, 2011: 64). The Ulster Covenant signified the importance the Protestant people of Ulster bestowed upon the Union with Great Britain at this time (Rose, 1976: 14; Arthur and Jeffery; 1988: 36; Porter, 1996: 130). Although the creation of a devolved Northern Ireland was an unintended side-effect of the Ulster reaction to the Home Rule Crisis, it did serve to reinforce the importance of maintaining Ulster's place within the Union (Bogdanor, 1999: 55; Lynch, 1999: 104). The impact of subsequent legislation such as the 1973 Sunningdale Agreement and the 1985 Anglo-Irish Agreement also had a direct impact on the development of Unionism within Northern Ireland (Faulkner, 1978: 190; McGarry and O'Leary, 1995: 96; Coulter, 2013: 417-418; Osmond, 1999: 34; Patterson, 2012: 248). The role played by the Ulster Unionist Party and the Democratic Unionist Party in Northern Ireland was also examined (McGlynn, 2014: 281; Ganiel, 2007: 319; Farrington, 2006: 2; Tonge *et al*, 2011: 123).

To understand how British identity within Northern Ireland compares to that of Great Britain, the meaning of the term Britishness first had to be interrogated. This was achieved by using the work of both political thinkers and historians such as Clarke (2001: 261), Aughey (2007a: 484), Colley (2014: 90) and others. The social

construction of cultural and national identity, such as Britishness, and how this promotes strong links and connections within certain demographics was examined through research by Smith (2001: 19), Anderson (2006: 26), McCrone (2013: 476) and Goodhart (2013: 292), finding that this creates cohesion within society and cements individuals within a nation. Rojek (2007: 8-9) and Millar and Ali (2014: 253) have argued that growing national cultures and identities are increasingly overtaking Britishness as an individual's primary identity. As discussed by Crick (1991: 73-74) and Hazell (2006: 1), the place of England has been 'the gaping hole' in arrangements post 1997. This is likely to change with increased attention now being given to English Nationalism following the 2014 Scottish independence referendum and the introduction of English Votes for English Laws at Westminster. The Scottish independence referendum and subsequent reassessment of devolution in the United Kingdom presents further changes to the concept of Britishness (Bechhoffer and McCrone, 2007: 252; McGlynn *et al*, 2012: 286 and Kellner, 2014).

Brown (2003: 31) and Byrne and O'Malley (2013: 131-132) have advanced theories that Northern Irish unionism is equally loyal and disloyal to the Union, meaning that by promoting the sovereignty of the Protestant Monarch and not her Parliament, they are actually in conflict with traditional versions of unionism that are prevalent in Great Britain. As observed by O'Malley (1983: 139), this may initiate a crisis of identity within Northern Ireland if Great Britain fails to include Northern Ireland as British. Rising national identities could lead to nations moving away from traditional concepts of Britishness. Commentators such as Kearney (1991: 4) and Southern (2007: 85) have argued that Northern Ireland has a uniquely 'Ulster' identity within the 'overarching identity' of Britishness (McBride, 1996: 4). Miller (1978: 4), Nelson (1984: 27) and Gardiner (2004: 145) further contributed to the research on this topic. The promotion of a separate Ulster identity may be key to incorporating cross-community relations within Northern Irish society as presumed by Trew (1994 cited Binks and Ferguson, 2014: 300). However, NicCraith (2003: 6) and Hearty (2014: 5-6) stated it may also be a way of further enhancing an attitude of difference. For example, in recent years British identity in Northern

Ireland has been viewed negatively due to media coverage of loyalist flag protests and parading disputes.

Politically, there are differences between Unionism in Northern Ireland and Great Britain, as stated by Farrington and Walker (2009: 136) and Walker (2010: 251). Culturally, it has long been argued by commentators such as Wilson and Stapleton (2006: 24) and McCartney (2013) that Northern Ireland has more in common with Scotland than it does with England. This view was further advanced by McAuley and Tonge (2009: 266). In terms of identity, Britishness is often portrayed as a result of a dominant English culture, raising the question that if Northern Ireland has little culturally in common with England, how truly British is it (Phillips *et al,* 1999: 154)? The thesis intends to address that question in the period after the Scottish referendum.

If the research then is considered as another study of the 'British Question', why is this necessary? The study of Britishness itself has often been somewhat confusing, especially when it comes to terminology, use of language and of distinguishing what is 'British' from what is 'English'. Within academic research there have been many contrasting views on the concept of what is British and what is English. For example, Krishan Kumar (2000: 256) wrote that very few institutions are English as opposed to British and this was 'true of Parliament, the monarchy, the law courts, the civil service, the armed forces, the broadcasting system and practically every other important national institution'. On the other hand, Robert Tombs (2014: 330) described England's central government, common law and Parliament to be 'the root-stock of Britishness onto which the others were grafted'. For the context of this research, Britishness refers to the overarching identity of the United Kingdom and to members of the Unionist community in Northern Ireland. Englishness on the other hand refers only to the single identity of the majority of individuals within England. Why then is the importance of making a clear distinction between the terminologies in academic research of British identity an issue? It is intriguing that despite a generation or more of research into the territorial politics of the United

Kingdom (Rose, 1982; Aughey, 2013) often the distinction, or more appropriately the relationship between Englishness and Britishness remains undetermined or confused (Kenny, 2015). It was a problem J.G.A. Pocock originally addressed with his plea for a new subject in 1975 with the object of writing *Four Nations History* (Kearney, 2012). Each of the four regions of the United Kingdom provides a rich background of culture, history and identity which has helped to create the British identity that is known and recognised today (Mullen, 2014: 635). To interchange Britishness with Englishness in this context is to downgrade the importance of the other three regions of the United Kingdom.

It is not always the case that the United Kingdom forgets to promote the importance of the smaller regions. Indeed, the Queen's Coronation provided symbolic expression of that Union, 'The bouquet had comprised lilies-of-the-valley from England, orchids from Wales, stephanotis from Scotland and carnations from Northern Ireland; and her Diadem had incorporated respective national symbols: roses, thistles and shamrocks' (Aughey, 2016). The role of the monarchy plays a huge cultural and social significance within the United Kingdom as a whole to help disseminate and promote a sense of Britishness which binds the Union together, as can be seen in the relationship between *Ulster* Unionists and the Crown. One of the difficulties of maintaining a nation-state such as the United Kingdom is that each of the four regions must be supported and valued by the whole in order to prevent any possible attempts to weaken or destroy the Union. As Lord Bew (2009) memorably put it when describing modern Britishness, consent used to be the principle which dared not speak its name but it is now the governing principle of the Union. The most recent example of the principle of consent playing a major role within the governance of the Union is that of the Scottish independence referendum of 2014 in which 45% of the population voted to leave the United Kingdom (Scottish Independence Referendum, 2014). Whilst the majority of people in Scotland did vote to remain in the Union, it remains an example of the present questioning of the value and permanence of the United Kingdom (Alexander cited Wintour, 2014). The principle of consent is not a new phenomenon within British

politics. Over thirty years ago Richard Rose (1982) developed an argument in which consent for the Union was 'contingent'. This notion of consent as contingency has often been discussed by theorists and historians who specialize in speculation about the potential break-up of the United Kingdom (Nairn, 1977; Colley, 1992).

According to Aughey in his 1989 book *Under Siege* this is how Unionism has perceived itself to be historically and politically, irrespective of its majority status in Northern Ireland and its monopoly of government office between 1921 and 1972. Whilst *Under Siege* was written as an observation of the response of *Ulster* Unionists to the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985, this thesis can be viewed as an analysis of the response of *Ulster* Unionists in regards to constitutional events such as the Scottish independence referendum of 2014 and the European referendum of 2016. Since its creation in 1921 Northern Ireland has been a contested territory, with a large minority of its population refusing to acknowledge or actively resisting its existence (Rose, 1976: 3). Therefore, for Unionists in Northern Ireland, how do you develop and promote a sense of Britishness when you feel that your identity is constantly under attack? How has this sense of an identity under threat developed alongside Britishness in Northern Ireland? What does this mean for the future of Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom? These are fundamental questions for any study of Britishness in the United Kingdom (with the challenge of nationalism in Scotland, for example) as well as in Northern Ireland and these questions remain of enduring significance.

British identity at the nation-state level is an important level of analysis, but by bringing the focus down to the more micro level of *Ulster* Unionism more detailed questions can be asked of the changing nature of what it means to be British in the twenty-first century. In traditional research on the politics of the United Kingdom, Northern Ireland has often been thought of as an exception to the rule. While the history of Great Britain has been predominantly concerned with Pulzer's (1967) famous statement that 'Class is the basis of British party politics; all else is

embellishment and detail', it is true the same cannot be said for Northern Ireland. While there is clearly a class system at play in Northern Ireland, it has its own unique structure to party politics that is separate from the party structures of the mainland. The Northern Irish political party structure is one that is formed by religious and ethno-national differences, not class. This has developed due to two circumstances. First, Northern Ireland as a state of its own has only been in existence since 1921. Second, ethno-national tensions and subsequent conflict has focused political attention in Northern Ireland on this issue, rather than that of class. Yet for all its time spent as an exception to the general rule of British politics Northern Ireland and in particular *Ulster* Unionism has found itself now very much front and centre of British politics. Northern Ireland's place within the Union is now as secure as it has ever been, with Scotland having taken over the mantel of the region of the Union most likely to leave. Most obvious is the 2017 deal between the Conservatives and the Democratic Unionist Party in which the Democratic Unionist Party became in effect a political kingmaker, or rather 'queenmaker', at Westminster, allowing them the ability to negotiate better deals for Northern Ireland whilst supporting the Conservative Party in major votes. The thesis argues that Britishness, and in particular Britishness within *Ulster* Unionism, is now central to British politics and issues such as identity, consent and nationhood will be examined in following chapters.

Studies of *Ulster* Unionism and how it relates to the politics and identity of the United Kingdom have been conducted in the past and whilst these studies have provided an academic basis from which this research could build upon, this study is necessary as it provides a more up-to-date look at this area, particularly during this period of constitutional unrest and rapid change (Rose, 1971; Miller, 1978; O'Malley, 1983; Todd, 1987). What is interesting about past studies is the contrasting nature by which Unionism in Northern Ireland can be observed. For Miller in *Queen's Rebels* (1978), Unionists from Northern Ireland are distinctive from the rest of the United Kingdom and do not fit into traditional templates of British politics or what it means to be British. In contrast, Rose (1971) believed that

the understanding of the views and opinions of Unionists from Northern Ireland is vital to contributing to the knowledge of British politics. As observed by Rose (1971: 206), 'An Ulster Protestant may describe himself as British, but doing this does not necessarily mean he thinks himself as English, Scottish and Welsh people do when the identify themselves thus. For the residents of Great Britain this label supplements their primary nationality. For the Ulsterman, it is a substitute for it'. Rose's approach is fascinating as it outlines the importance of British identity both as a social identity and also as a means of *Ulster* Unionists electing to be a part of the United Kingdom. It is this approach of Rose that the thesis most clearly draws inspiration from. Academic debate on the topic of *Ulster* Unionism has failed to acknowledge and appreciate the importance of cultural and national diversity in its contribution to the understanding of contemporary Britishness. Previous research had aimed to address this, such as Miller (1978), Nelson (1984) and O'Malley (1983). However, these do not provide an up-to-date account of how British identity is defined and shaped within the Northern Ireland context, particularly by Unionist designated political elites within the post-Good Friday Agreement society. Tonge *et al* (2014: 110-128), briefly discussed this issue within the book *The Democratic Unionist Party: From Protest to Power*, yet as the chapter is only nineteen pages and it only focuses on one party, more research is vital to provide a greater understanding. Tonge *et al* observed that for the Democratic Unionist Party, 'the essence of the relationship with other parts of the UK has been encapsulated by robust claims to British identity and expressed through the values of cultural unionism, celebrating the virtues of Protestantism and the Union within a discrete ethnic identity.' (2014: 112). However, whilst providing a detailed look at cultural Unionism, it failed to take into account the elective, or instrumental, components which tie *Ulster* Unionism to the Union.

This research provides a current study of this complex identity within a contested space during a time of ongoing political and constitutional upheaval. How Britishness, and Britishness within Northern Ireland, react to these challenges is central to understanding the fluidity and resilience of social identities in times of

crisis. Yet as research by historian Linda Colley (2014: 90) has observed, the United Kingdom is in an almost unique position in the world in dealing with constitutional change due to the flexibility of the British constitution. Flexibility may be a misleading term given the fact the United Kingdom does not have a codified constitution, but it is this reliance on tradition and institutions that is perhaps the reason why the United Kingdom has survived for so long. It is also in part the reason why British identity has been able to meet times of crisis head on and adapt to these events. The question of the changing nature of British identity is not a new phenomenon as thinkers such as Dicey and Rait were discussing this very issue in 1920 in their book *Thoughts on the Union Between England and Scotland* which was 'an attempt to comment upon the nature and the results of a great legal or political transaction' which was the 1707 Act of Union (1920: vi). As observed by Aughey (2001b: 60), 'Only something that is outside history can be changeless'.

1.3: Methodology

A methodological process was established for the thesis which included both desk based primary research and qualitative analysis using semi-structured one-on-one interviews with Unionist designated politicians. These two methods were used simultaneously to gather data which best answered the questions set out throughout this thesis.

Of course, the study of identity is an area full of contradictions and of seemingly impossible simultaneously held viewpoints. Often when questioned about their identity, participants in the research expressed this was the first time they had truly tried to define and label how they felt. Identity can often be contradictory in that it is personal, yet it is also something that is not often analysed and dissected at an individual level (Lawler, 2007: 5). It is an inert feeling held by the individual that is personal and held to be true to oneself, that even if it contains competing narratives, that these can be internalised and justified by the individual. Identity is

something that is inherently different to each individual and this makes an academic study of group identity, particularly within an elite group, so complex. Political socialisation is a complex system based upon the assumption that children are inducted into a set of beliefs and attitudes based upon the influence of adults in their lives (Marsh, 1971: 456; Jennings and Niemi, 1968: 466). Many different factors seek to influence and shape it, such as attitudes of family members, culture, the education system, geography, religion, class and roles within society, if to name only a few.

Therefore identity cannot be rigidly structured and applied to whole sections of a community. This is the dilemma faced within academia regarding Northern Ireland and Britishness. One size does not necessarily fit all and this only seeks to further confuse and therefore narrow academic understandings of identity and terminology. The decision to interview only Unionist designated politicians was an attempt to address the plethora of identities within the Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist community by focusing on elite identity and how this appears to represent Unionist identity. To see if there is a correlation between the identity of Unionist designated politicians and the community which they serve, information from the Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey was compared to the data gathered from participants to provide a more holistic approach to identity.

1.3.1 Literature review

Through the critical search of previous academic literature in this field, areas were acknowledged where an *Ulster* Unionist contribution was lacking, such as during discussions on the future of the Union and of narratives surrounding national identity (Kumar, 2010). This past inability to include the views of *Ulster* Unionists damages the academic narrative in two ways. Firstly, it ignores the opinions and views of an entire region of the United Kingdom, resulting in the promotion of a false sense of Britishness that is defined as only referring to the geographical entity

that is Great Britain. The exclusion of Northern Ireland from these discussions is damaging as it promotes a sense of Northern Ireland being a place apart, an almost second class region within the United Kingdom and therefore not being of any significant relevance within the Union. Secondly, it ignores an extremely valuable and interesting case study of the nature of Britishness. Northern Ireland (as discussed in Chapters Two and Three) has different cultural, historical, political and constitutional influences upon British identity that are not experienced elsewhere in the United Kingdom. Britishness is an important component of life in Northern Ireland and for Unionists in particular the union between Northern Ireland and Great Britain is of intrinsic value.

1.3.2: Interviews

How therefore does one even begin to design a methodology to begin researching this area? In a practical regard this is a situation where qualitative methods come into their own as it is the nature of qualitative research that 'the invisible becomes visible', allowing hidden themes and views to be expressed and analysed (Constas, 1992: 254). It was clear from an early stage in the research that quantitative research would never begin to provide the level of data and understanding that was needed for a study such as this. Statistics, like those found in the Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey are a useful tool for observing what percentages of a population believe in a certain view, or assign to a certain societal demographic. However, quantitative data does not provide the answers as to *why* these individuals have chosen to assign to these particular views and expressions, which is where qualitative analysis provides a key component. The personal views and opinions of the participants should be at the forefront of the research and 'In-depth interviewing is a particularly useful method for examining the social world from the points of view of research participants' (Miller and Glassner, 2011: 137). Semi-structured one-on-one interviews were chosen as the preferred methodology (Bryman, 2012: 469-470). This form of interview was chosen as it is the best method of gaining large amounts of qualitative data from political elites regarding

their own experiences of identity and how this has shaped their political convictions. It was particularly useful for observing the views of Unionist designated politicians on the events which have created constitutional unrest across the Union in recent years (Manheim and Rich, 1986: 133). As a group which holds key political power and influence in Northern Ireland, Unionist designated politicians are at the forefront of discussions surrounding the major constitutional and political events of recent years which have threatened to impact upon the Union. Their insights provide understanding into a specific turbulent time in British political history from a region of the United Kingdom that is no stranger to turbulent scenarios. The method of semi-structured one-on-one interviews was invaluable as it provided the researcher with the flexibility to follow up on any lines of enquiry identified during the interview process which had not been previously anticipated. Often it is the unprompted and unexpected responses that provide the most valuable contribution in research.

By developing the question schedule (see questions in Appendix Six) within a semi-structured framework this enabled a greater degree of communication and rapport between the researcher and the participants. It also, as was intended, helped enable the researcher to follow up on interesting lines of enquiry which may not have been evident prior to the commencement of the interview process. From a qualitative research standpoint this is an ideal perspective for the conduct of research as the ability to delve deeper into the subjects has the potential to discover more than was originally intended. All interviews were transcribed by the researcher to ensure familiarity with the data and 'From the transcribed conversations, patterns of experiences can be listed', meaning that themes the researcher may have missed during the initial interview were picked up during the process of transcribing (Aronson, 1994). The idea of the researcher transcribing the interviews rather than subcontracting this stage out to another was beneficial as sometimes it is not *what* is said in an interview, but *how* it is said by a participant which makes all the difference to the point at hand and in qualitative research this can be as important as the actual verbal content.

Identity cannot be studied within a laboratory setting as this is simply impossible. It is necessary to acknowledge there will be a degree of outside influences that imposes upon the answers provided by participants. The very environment of the interview itself can sway opinions. For example, the majority of interviews conducted took place in Stormont. Within Northern Irish politics heavy importance is placed upon the designation of politicians in the Northern Irish Assembly, the reasoning is to ensure a consociational government which represents both ethno-national communities. It may be the case for participants interviewed at Stormont that the significance of this was not lost on them and in fact may have led to them taking a harder stance on their identity than they may have done in a more neutral setting. The theoretical approach in Chapter Four reimagines Schrödinger's famous experiment for Unionists is in itself an imperfect hypothetical due to this. The hypothetical box Unionists are placed can be imagined as either Northern Ireland or Stormont, yet neither of these are neutral spaces and both influence the potential possibilities of Britishness. A further limitation of the methodology connected to the theoretical framework the very act of questioning identity and the paradox which this can create. Within the interconnected framework of Schrodinger, Descartes and Baudrillard, one aspect that kept reappearing is that of doubt. This is interesting in the context of the interviews as the very act of questioning the identity of a participant had the potential to cast doubt upon that identity. For Descartes, the concept of *Cogito, ergo sum* can only be conducted after circumstance has thrown doubt upon the existence of an individual and that only by partaking in the logical process of *Cogito, ergo sum* can the individual once again comfortably assert that they do in fact exist (Williams, 1978: 73-74). The doubt experienced when asked to define identity also connects to Baudrillard and the process of simulation (1994: 6). If the participant is questioned and feels their identity is not British enough, they then have the potential to create a hyperreal version of Britishness that they believe will put to rest any supposed doubt as to the authenticity of their Britishness. By having their identity questioned, the participant may feel as though their identity is being threatened and may answer accordingly. When regarded through the lens of Schrödinger (1935) it is no surprise as to observe something is to inherently change it, the act of observation will only

ever be privy to one possibility, when it is only through the hypothetical scenario of Schrödinger's thought experiment that one could believe in multiple possibilities existing at once (see Chapter Four, section 3.4.2).

1.3.3: Ethics process

The ethics procedure for the thesis was straightforward as the research was not deemed to be controversial and the participants are not from high risk or vulnerable groups. This enabled the ethics process to move quickly, allowing more time to be devoted to the data collection period.

Choosing who to interview for any qualitative research project is an important decision for a researcher to make. The rationale for the recruitment of Unionist designated politicians from Northern Ireland was to provide an in-depth examination on what defines their identity as Unionist elites and how this influences their views and opinions on both politics and the relationship between Northern Ireland and Great Britain. As outlined by Kourvetaris and Dobratz (1980: 35), 'Many authors assume that an analysis of origins of members of the elites provides some understanding of its social and political behaviour' and within the research identity has been chosen as the starting point from which to begin this analysis. Unionist politicians were chosen as they are elected representatives of their community and 'By virtue of their elected or appointed positions in the formal government structures, Leaders normally exercise dominant power in the political system' (Olsen, 1980: 109). The decision was made to exclude all non-Unionist designated politicians from the research to focus on the lack of academic research which has been conducted on Unionist politicians in regards to Britishness. Their contribution would have presented a different dynamic to the research and this could be conducted in the future as a potential follow up study to be conducted after the publication of this thesis to expand upon the original conclusions of the research.

To discuss the views and opinions of Unionist designated politicians, it was necessary to first interview them to accurately gain an understanding of how they self-define their identity and how they see the relationship between Northern Ireland and Great Britain in a contemporary United Kingdom. Finding the right balance of participants for qualitative research is an important component and as defined by Manheim and Rich (1986: 87):

> 'A **population** is any group of people, objects, or events about which we want to draw conclusions, while a *case* is any member of such a population. A **sample** is any *subgroup* of a population of cases which is identified for analysis.'

The recruitment process for the research was straight forwarded. All Unionist designated MEPs, MPs and MLAs from Northern Ireland were invited to take part first via letter. Follow up correspondence and invitations to newly co-opted or elected Unionist politicians were sent via email, with phone calls being used to establish contact after this point. At the start, the invitation to the participant was sent directly to individual participants to establish a direct link between the researcher and the participant in the hope this would encourage rapport and a good working relationship. After the original response rate dropped and follow up emails/phone calls failed to garner any further uptake, requests were sent to the press offices of both major Unionist political parties, the Democratic Unionist Party and the Ulster Unionist Party, in order to increase uptake in participation. Unfortunately, the theory behind this was more positive than the implementation and uptake did not increase. Contacting the party structures to encourage support did very little to bolster participation, leading to the conclusion that direct contact is always preferable when requesting interviews with politicians.

Anonymity was discussed from the start of the research. According to Henn *et al* (2006: 94), 'Anonymity ensures that a person remains nameless and unidentifiable' meaning that in theory they cannot be recognised through their contribution to the research. Although the subject matter of the research was neither contentious nor

inflammatory it was felt that by allowing the participants the freedom to voice their views without being acknowledged personally, more personal and intrinsic views would be provided, hence benefiting the aims of the research. By allowing participants to remain anonymous this provided a safe environment for individuals to disagree with some of the policies or stances held by their respective parties in a way that would not have repercussions. This again highly benefited the research as one of the objectives was to discern the personal and sometimes private views of Unionist designated politicians on their identity and their feelings towards Britishness and the United Kingdom. The researcher was aware from the beginning that by applying a principle of anonymity to such a small group of high profile individuals is in itself inherently difficult, but everything has been done to achieve this. This was particularly important during the writing up stage, as outlined by Hennick *et al* (2011: 76), in the statement that 'Anonymity is ensured when selecting quotations of participants while writing the results.'

By including the clause on anonymity, a higher rate of participation was gained than was originally expected. A number of participants stated off the record that they had agreed to take part in the research expressly because they were offered anonymity and felt that this allowed them greater scope to discuss topics without the possibility of repercussions from their parties and/or their electorate. This was highly beneficial for the research as this enabled the researcher to look at the diversity of views and opinions not just within Unionism in Ulster, but also within individual Unionist political parties. It was interesting to hear participants talking through their thought processes when it came to where their own personal views sat in relation to official party stances on issues such as the European referendum. In order to protect the anonymity of participants, code names were given to each participant, for example, 'Participant (Number)' was used. This rather impersonal method of coding participants was chosen to prevent any subconscious researcher bias which may have emerged through the process of assigning a pseudonym to each participant. As not every participant in this study belonged to the two main Unionist parties, namely the Democratic Unionist Party and the Ulster Unionist

Party, it was decided that no party or independent status should be provided alongside the participant's code name. This was a measure added to protect the anonymity of politicians who were either independents or from smaller parties.

Informed consent was a major factor in the research, with all participants being fully informed of the nature of the research before giving their consent (Mason, 1996: 57). This was achieved by providing potential participants with information which clearly and concisely outlined the aims, objectives, and rationale of the research prior to their agreeing to partake. After this a consent form was signed by participants prior to the interviews being conducted. At the start of every interview each participant was asked if they were comfortable with their interview being recorded by the researcher with the option to have the interview written in notes rather than recorded. Part of the process of gaining conformed consent from participants was that each individual had the option to withdraw their consent at any point prior to the submission of the thesis.

Once the interviews were conducted, the issue of how and where to store the data became a primary ethical concern. Under the Data Protection Act, all information has to be securely stored. Raw data, such as paper copies of the interview transcripts and participant's consent form, have been filed in a secure locked cabinet on premises at Ulster University. All processed data, such as electronic copies of the recordings and transcriptions, have been stored on the Ulster University computer system on a password protected computer, with copies saved to the Cloud, an external hard drive and a password protected pen drive.

1.4: Thesis structure

The constitutional uncertainties in the United Kingdom, accentuated particularly by the Scottish independence referendum in 2014 and the Brexit referendum in 2016, have led to speculation that we are moving towards an 'ever looser union' (Paun

and Munro, 2015). This has led to some existential questioning among scholars 'what is the United Kingdom for?' in terms of this ever looser union? How does this recalibration of the Union affect our understanding of British identity and subcategories of identity therein?

The objective of the research is to investigate how elected Unionist representatives understand the implications of constitutional unrest on the United Kingdom and on British identity. As outlined within Chapters Two and Three the frameworks of the constitutional, social and economic unions have been developed to analyse the diverse, yet unified nature of the United Kingdom in a way that seeks to reconcile the instrumental and non-instrumental components of the Union through the framework of elective affinity (see Chapter Four, section 4.3). The purpose is to assess the state of Unionist political thinking on a range of relevant matters such as allegiance and identity, contract and solidarity and instrumentalism and non-instrumentalism and to correlate these views with Northern Ireland's place within the Union. The Ulster Question has once again emerged as central to the British Question following events such as the deal between the Conservative Party and the Democratic Unionist Party in 2017 (see Chapter Three, section 3.4). The research will examine if there is a common sense of Britishness which continues to bind the regions of the United Kingdom together or if identity within Unionism in Northern Ireland is more fluid and broad than previous literature on this subject would suggest (see Chapter Five). This thesis has been separated into three sections to provide the best layout to the information provided. Part One outlines the conceptual background to the thesis. Part Two discusses the participant interviews and how the answers provided fit in with the framework outlined within Part One. Part Three will be a discussion of all that has been examined previously and will end by answering the questions which have been raised throughout. The chapters will be laid out in the following manner.

Part One

Chapter Two provides an extensive review of the relevant academic literature on Britishness and identity. It argues that Britishness is now the core political question of the twenty-first century, overtaking the issue of class. This is due to the structure of the United Kingdom as a union state and the question of how conflicting identities can and should be managed within the Union following recent constitutional events such as the 2014 Scottish independence referendum and the 2016 European referendum. Examination of Britishness is achieved through the discussion of allegiance and identity, contract and solidarity and instrumentalism and non-instrumentalism within the frameworks of the constitution, social and economic unions which bind the United Kingdom.

Chapter Three narrows the scope of the literature review to look at Northern Irish Unionism as a case study of Britishness. This chapter examines the paradoxes of allegiance and identity which exist within *Ulste*r Unionism. From this, questions are developed which will be tested throughout this thesis, hypothetically in Chapter Four and in Part Two of the thesis through the answers provided by Unionist politicians.

Chapter Four details two theoretical approaches which are discussed within this thesis. The first is an interdisciplinary tripartite conceptual framework which combines the theories of Schrödinger, Descartes and Baudrillard to analyse the traditional anti-Unionist arguments surrounding British identity. The second is the framework of elective affinity which is used to provide a positive interpretation of Ulster Britishness and which this thesis hypothesises could be used to reconcile the paradoxes which exist between Unionism and Britishness. This chapter also provides hypothetical answers to the questions developed within Chapter Three.

Part Two

Chapter Five examines the nature of identity within *Ulster* Unionism from the perspective of Unionist politicians. This information is then connected back to Part One of the thesis through the frameworks of allegiance and identity, contract and solidarity and difference and unity to understand how *Ulster* Unionism can be used as a case study of Britishness within the United Kingdom.

Chapters Six widens the focus to observe British Unionism and examine how the 2014 Scottish independence referendum impacted upon both *Ulster* Unionists and of the United Kingdom as a whole. This information will then be discussed to see what, if anything, this can show about the nature of the United Kingdom with particular focus on the concepts of shared rule and self-rule and of the instrumental and non-instrumental unions which exist across the Union.

Chapter Seven examines the most recent constitutional event to occur within the United Kingdom, the European referendum of 2016 and the subsequent decision of the United Kingdom as a whole to leave the European Union. With so many unknowns surrounding this political decision it is important to gauge what effect this could have on the United Kingdom as a whole. It was also an opportunity to ascertain the views of *Ulster* Unionists on current and major political events and get an understanding of what this decision means to them.

Chapter Eight draws Part Two to a close by asking Unionist politicians for their views on the future of the United Kingdom. This was core to understanding how *Ulster* Unionists see themselves and Northern Ireland as a whole within this Union.

Part Three

Finally, Chapter Nine re-examines the information discussed throughout the thesis and presents it as a final polished product. It re-visits the paradoxes of Britishness and Unionism outlined and discussed within Part One and Part Two and reframes it within the framework of elective affinity to answer the questions that have been posed by this thesis.

1.5: Conclusion

This chapter provides a condensed synopsis of what will be discussed throughout the thesis. The thesis observes British identity at three distinctive levels: first as an in-depth examination of British identity within a contested region of the United Kingdom – Northern Ireland, it then analyses this to see what Britishness within *Ulster* Unionism can tell us about Britishness at the nation-state level in a time of rapid constitutional change, as well as overarchingly being a study of complex identities at a time of complex change.

Chapter Two

Paradoxes of British Identity

2.1: Introduction

The first section of this thesis, Part One, is concerned with outlining the conceptual frameworks through which the paradoxes of *Ulster* Unionism and British national identity will be understood. This will then frame the conversations surrounding the empirical component of this thesis which will be discussed within Part Two.

Britain, according to Anderson (2006: 26), is 'an imagined political community' like all other political communities, portrayed to citizens as being 'imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign', yet both the limit and the sovereignty of the United Kingdom has been threatened within recent years. At the time of writing, the United Kingdom is currently undergoing a period of constitutional upheaval at an unprecedented scale. Due to recent events such as the 2014 Scottish independence referendum, the 2016 European referendum and both the 2015 and 2017 General Elections, questions over the stability of the United Kingdom as a multi-national state and the meaning of British national identity have been raised. The rise of nationalism in Scotland and England, alongside the ever present Ulster Question, challenges the success of the United Kingdom as an inclusive and all-encompassing multi-national state. While Britishness is often taken to be the overarching civic identity of the Union, the role of regional ethnic identities cannot be ignored, particularly in a time of constitutional unrest. As argued by Farrington and Walker (2009: 135), these identities have been left out of academic understandings of Britishness for too long. Now is the time to address this.

National identity has not always been the core issue of British politics. Ever since Lloyd George (as historian A.J.P. Taylor quipped) conjured the Irish Question out of British politics, *Ulste*r Unionism has generally been considered to be marginal to modern British history and politics. This was the case in that era inaugurated by

what Maurice Cowling called 'the impact of Labour' (1971) in which the academic focus shifted from the grand issues of the constitution to questions of class and socio-economic policy. It was especially so after 1945 when politics was defined by two party competition and, according to Peter Pulzer, class was the basis of British politics and all else was embellishment and detail (1967). Even amongst some Unionists in Northern Ireland, such as the Campaign for Equal Citizenship, it was thought that 'real politics' existed across the water and, by contrast, politics in Northern Ireland was stuck in a different mould. One recent study (Biressi and Nunn 2013: 13-15) observed that by the mid-1990s class appeared to have been displaced as a useful model of analysis for understanding social change in the United Kingdom. Certainly, in the 2017 General Election as Ford (2017) observed, class politics had actually been turned upside down. Today things look rather different. Across the United Kingdom questions of identity, the constitution, nationhood and the Union have become mainstream and not marginal. It is the politics of class which no longer seems central. Barker argues that questions of national unity are more important than that of class and highlighted that the state has a significant role to play in the creation and promotion of British identity (1947). It can be argued that we are currently witnessing this shift away from class politics to identity politics. What happens next is dependent upon how the British state reacts to this challenge.

Britishness has become one of the major political issues for this generation as the traditional institutions of Britishness are weakening, leading to a crisis of national identity across the United Kingdom (Wright and Gamble, 2000). Part of this concern is that devolution is weakening the overall sovereignty of the nation-state by allowing the regions greater political autonomy. This harks back to the questions raised about devolution in the 1970s when it was thought that the rise of nationalism would lead to the inevitable end of the United Kingdom (Nairn, 1977). Yet, even with Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales having their own devolved institutions, the Union still stands - even with the attempt of Scottish Nationalists to gain independence in 2014, the Union remains. It may be that allowing a more

relaxed Union that allows regional identities to flourish and celebrates the diversity of the four regions actually helps to unify the United Kingdom, but in looser terms than has previously been the case (Wright and Gamble, 2000). The question of identity is important as when people feel threatened they tend to retreat into 'exclusive identities', such as the polarisation of Britishness and Irishness that occurred in Northern Ireland during the period of the Troubles (Brown, 2006). As will be observed in Chapter Six, when *Ulster* Unionists feel secure within the Union they are more likely to relax their definitions of identity and to see diversity within the United Kingdom as a positive. This is the same across the United Kingdom. Gordon Brown's 2006 speech to the Fabian Society echoes the sentiment of Wright and Gamble's paper in that in order for the Union to continue, Britishness must change to allow difference to be accepted and necessary. This will be examined in greater depth elsewhere in the thesis.

This chapter will examine the United Kingdom through the historical and political events and institutions which define it. The character of Britishness will then be addressed both historically and culturally to provide an answer to the question *What is Britishness?* Historical and contemporary issues of tension in British identity will then be examined. The following chapter will introduce the question of the distinctiveness, yet also representativeness, of British identity within Northern Ireland Unionism during a time of constitutional unrest across the whole of the United Kingdom.

2.2: The United Kingdom paradox

The characteristics of nations and nationhood have been observed throughout history. For Anthony Smith, the defining characteristic of a nation is territory; how a nation is formed, how borders are defined and protected, and who resides within these borders (1971; 1995). For Benedict Anderson (2006), nationhood and identity are social constructs, or 'imagined communities' created by the individuals themselves (Axel, 2003: 118). Often, nations can be viewed as a unique snapshot

into a current period of world history as they are constantly changing depending on the circumstances of the time in which they exist (Hobsbawn, 1990: 9). How then would one define the United Kingdom? Gellner theorised that, '…nationalism is a theory of political legitimacy, which requires that ethnic boundaries should not cut across political ones…' (1983: 1), yet this is not the case in the United Kingdom. The biggest distinction between the United Kingdom and the majority of nations across the world is that it is a 'union state', meaning that it is a state made up of separate nations (Tompkins, 2015). This distinction is important as it asks the question of how one relates multi-national difference to state unity within the United Kingdom. There is an untold bias between the ways in which the identity of the United Kingdom can be portrayed. The identity of the Union can be portrayed as that of difference, with Nationalist identities being at the forefront, or as the unity identity of Britishness. While these distinctions are part of the Union, they cannot be discussed in separation from each other. To see the United Kingdom as a union state defined by difference fails to take into account the shared history of the British Isles and of the importance of political representation at Westminster, the national parliament. Equally, to view the United Kingdom as unitary fails to understand the complexity of it as a union state and downplays the importance of regional identities within the Union. The union state status of the United Kingdom is vital in that it represents it as both a unified nation state and also as being multi-national (Kidd, 2015). Like two sides of a coin, these two component concepts of the United Kingdom as a union state are inseparable. One way of reconciling this paradox is yet another paradox - elective affinity as a means of explaining the complexities of British identity within the Union (see Chapter Four).

George Boyce (1995) argued that the question at the time of Irish Home Rule and subsequently is this: 'was the United Kingdom inhabited by a single nation, however much regional or even patriotic differences might distinguish its component parts'; or was it 'one whose national distinctions made it essential that they should be given some constitutional recognition?' This is a leitmotif of Union and it is a vital insight when trying to understand the United Kingdom as a union state. When

looking at the first part of Boyce's distinction, that of the United Kingdom as a single nation, one can see the importance of political representation in creating this single nation. Yet what Boyce and subsequent political thinkers have argued based upon this distinction is that while it is biased towards state unity, it still understands that each region of the United Kingdom has its own unique cultural identity. Dicey and Rait (1920) and later Pocock (1975) suggest that cultural difference within Britishness is more ingrained than thinkers such as Nairn would have one believe. They argue that the history of Britishness is the history of each of the component regions and that without the diversity of each of the regions there would be no such thing as a British identity. Dicey and Rait (1920) argued that the separate nations of the United Kingdom should 'preserve as much of the noble spirit and traditions of their separate nationality as may be compatible with the wider sense and the extended patriotism which ought to bind together all the citizens of the one politically united country'. By doing so, this method promotes the individual cultural identities of each nation, while simultaneously protecting the overarching dominant identity of Britishness. According to Sir Ernest Barker, the United Kingdom is simultaneously a multi-national state and a single nation. It is this ability to be viewed as simultaneously one or both which has allowed the United Kingdom to survive for so long, even when history has shown itself to be unkind to multi-national states such as Austria-Hungary. Barker's concept of Britishness, as similar to both the diversity and unity and elective affinity tropes of this thesis, and argues that political representation is needed to bind the regions together, but that this elective choice is not enough without a shared sense of belonging to reinforce it. In Barker's case, the political representation is backed up by the accommodation of distinctive regional identities (Stapleton, 1994). Davies argues that the entire British problem has been caused by the issue of nomenclature, meaning that there is a lack of knowledge from residents of the United Kingdom on what the state is (1999). The argument for the United Kingdom being a combination of unity and diversity is clear in the Unionist claim that the four component regions are stronger together than they are apart, but that each also adds a unique contribution to the United Kingdom by being a part of it. Richard Rose defined this distinction in 1982 in the idea of the maze and the mace. What these concepts refer to are the

concepts of diversity and unity. For Rose, the maze refers to the diverse institutions of local government and national culture while the mace refers to the unifying authority of the Crown at Westminster. Rose observed that 'Multiform institutions are consistent with the maintenance of the Union so long as all partners to the Union continue to accept the authority of the Crown in Parliament' (1982). Though in 1982 Rose was writing against devolution as a real threat to the United Kingdom, one may argue that devolution within the Union has redefined the balance institutionally. As outlined by constitutional theorist Daniel Elazar (1987), the United Kingdom is now a balance between 'self rule', referring to devolution and 'shared rule' referring to the national parliament at Westminster.

While the above theorists acknowledge the cultural distinctiveness of the regions alongside integration through political representation, not all political thinkers and historians agree on this. The question of whether or not British is an *artificial* identity opposed to *authentic* national identities such as Scottish and Welsh has divided academics. Historian Linda Colley (1992: 5) suggests that this was in fact the case as the Union was 'an invented nation superimposed, if only for a while, onto much older alignments and loyalties', while Tom Nairn argues this point as a certainty in his 1977 book *The Break-Up of Britain.* For David Marquand this theory states that the British Empire gave meaning to the British and that without it there is no Union, just the component parts.

When examining Boyce's second distinction, that regional differences should mean that the nations of the United Kingdom should be given their own political representation, one can clearly see how devolution comes into the equation. As Tompkins observed, devolution within the United Kingdom has been brought about by a mix of both popular and parliamentary sovereignty. This is important as popular demand alone within the regions cannot secure devolution, the national parliament at Westminster must also accept and promote this. What this tells us about the United Kingdom as a union state is that it works as a half-way house between unity and separation. For Colin Kidd, one way to ensure that Britishness

and devolution continue to work together is to change the format of the House of Lords to a 'House of Nations' similar to the US Senate (2008). This design would allow each region to have equal say over matters of legislation governing the union state, whilst also allowing each region to continue to govern its own day-to-day affairs through devolution, hence promoting an increased sense of unity between the nations of the United Kingdom. Within Northern Ireland these questions of statehood and devolution were played out alongside the violence experienced by Northern Ireland during the ethno-national conflict of the Troubles. The constitutional question was key to this conflict, with Unionists seeking to maintain the connection to Great Britain whilst nationalists argued for the reunification of Ireland. Rose (1971) believed that the understanding of the views and opinions of Unionists from Northern Ireland was vital to contributing to the knowledge of British politics. As Rose observed (1971: 206), 'An Ulster Protestant may describe himself as British, but doing this does not necessarily mean he thinks himself as English, Scottish and Welsh people do when the identify themselves thus. For the residents of Great Britain, this label supplements their primary nationality. For the Ulsterman, it is a substitute for it'. Rose's approach outlined the importance of British identity both as a social identity, but also as a means of *Ulster* Unionists electing to be a part of the United Kingdom. This point is also significant when looked at alongside Kearney's statement that although the United Kingdom is a multi-national state, the distinctions between ethnic and civic identity within the Union have long been overlooked (2000: 16).

National identity within the United Kingdom is a complex system, rather like an iceberg. The part that people see above water is the overarching civic national identity of Britishness. Yet below the surface is a much larger body of identity that makes up this national identity. Regional and ethnic identities across the four regions of the United Kingdom have merged together from the first Act of Union in 1536 between England and Wales to create the Britishness that one can see today. British identity is not a standalone concept that was created from thin air. Instead it is a complex blend of multiple identities created to solidify a complex multi-

national state. What is interesting now is that the territorial question of the United Kingdom is once again central to British politics following the Scottish independence referendum of 2014. When taken as a case study, the position of Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom raises interesting questions about identity and allegiance, nationhood and belonging and solidarity within the Union. All of these are themes that will be discussed at length throughout the thesis.

While devolution can be viewed as a method of securing the idea of the United Kingdom as a multi-national state, it also raises concerns about the potential break-up of the Union (Aughey, 2007b). It has been noted previously that devolution can act as a half-way house of both self and shared rule, yet for many political thinkers such as Nairn it can be portrayed as a half-way house towards the disintegration of the Union. This concept almost came to fruition on the 18th September 2014 when the Scottish electorate took part in a referendum to decide if Scotland should become an independent nation. The result was that 55% of the Scottish population voted to remain within the Union. This may not have been a large enough victory for the No campaign to put questions of Scotland's future within the Union to rest for a generation, yet it has proven that the union state still holds relevance for those who live within it. Even if the Union remains for the moment secure, questions are still raised over how this affects understandings of identity within the United Kingdom.

For Andrews and Mycock, devolution has created a new territorial aspect to British politics which makes it increasingly hard for politicians to speak of the United Kingdom and British national identity as a whole (2008, 141; Brown, 2007). When it comes to teaching citizenship within the United Kingdom there are conflicting narratives over national and multiple identities and how to reconcile the differences between the two. What this thesis will argue in Chapter Four through the framework of elective affinity is that - within a union state - concepts of nation and multiple identities do not have to be conflicting but can exist simultaneously and enhance each other within the Union, creating a structure of national unity

through regional diversity. As with the questions asked by Boyce previously, Pocock (1975) also distinguished the importance of diversity in unity, stating that each region has played a core part within the history of the United Kingdom and that this should be incorporated within British history. This move towards a more multi-national approach to the history of the United Kingdom was further developed by Hugh Kearney in his 1989 book *The British Isles: A History of Four Nations*. What Kearney was attempting was to create was a history that not only focused on England, but brought in the experiences of all regions of the Union together. As Kearney (2006: 1) observed:

> 'To concentrate upon a single "national" history, which is based upon the political arrangements of the present, is to run the risk of being imprisoned within a cage of partial assumptions which lead to the perpetuation of nationalist myths and legends.'

The British constitution is currently in a state of flux. With no codified constitution it can be hard to understand how the United Kingdom is supposed to meet these challenges of separate national identities within a union state. For Bogdanor (2009), the core of the British constitution is political representation and the continuation of this. Political representation has been achieved in the United Kingdom through the use of multiple levels of government, such as devolved institutions and the continuation of a national parliament with representation from all four nations. Whilst at first it may seem that devolution would be detrimental to the structure of the United Kingdom it must be acknowledged that it has potentially saved the Union as currently the majority of individuals within the Union wish for it to remain (Hazell, 2009: 101). Without devolution, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales would not have the power to legislate for themselves or to promote their own regional identities. Yet rather than this giving them a taste for further devolution or even independence, it has served to provide them with more security within the United Kingdom (Jeffrey and Wincott, 2006; Curtice, 2006). With the constitutional aspect of the United Kingdom having changed – from the first of Boyce's definitions to the second - how then does this impact upon national identity within the Union?

2.3: The Britishness paradox

Discussions of Britishness are not straightforward. It is not a concept that can succinctly be reduced to sound bites within a political speech (Colls, 2011: 574). Identity within a union state, as discussed above, is somewhat more complex as it contains both multi-national and multi-cultural aspects. Each of the four nations is different, each with different identities and cultures. The problem of British identity is not the creation of one overarching umbrella identity that is forced upon all of the nations of the United Kingdom, rather a British identity that acknowledges and celebrates difference (Dicey and Rait, 1920; Barker, 1947). The study of British identity has struggled with this problem, particularly when trying to reconcile ethnic (national identities such as Englishness) and civic (more inclusive) concepts of identity within this island nation (Kearney, 2000: 20; Britishness and Belonging study, 2005). Yet it is vital during this time of constitutional unrest that questions of identity are answered as it is the social glue through which the nations of the United Kingdom are connected (Smith and Jarkko, 1998). At the core of these questions of ethnic and civic identity is devolution. While political theorists since the 1970s have viewed devolution as the means by which the Union will end, in identity terms one can argue that devolution has ensured that the regions are now more a part of the United Kingdom than they have been previously (Colls, 2011: 577). For historians such as Colley, the loss of the Empire followed by a waning of Protestantism and industrialism has triggered a slow decline within British national identity, yet Britishness still exists (1992). Nationhood, as observed by Jacobson, is a process, not an entity (2002: 189). It is ever evolving and changing, meaning that change does not have to herald the end of the Union (Ward, 2004; Robbins, 2005: 488). Pocock (2000) has been critical of Nairn's view of Britishness, arguing that his ideas surrounding class and the monarchy are outdated.

If British identity has changed, why and how has this happened? Andreouli and Howarth through research on immigration and British identity, found that identity also refers to how individuals felt they are treated by state policies (2013, 378).

This is an interesting finding as it can be referred to discussions surrounding devolution and political representation. Barker, as examined in section 2.2, states that political representation is necessary to create a sense of belonging within the United Kingdom. This can explain in part why devolution has not led to further dissolution of the Union as while regional policies are created within the devolved institutions issues of national importance are still discussed at the national parliament, a body that continues to contain representatives from each nation of the United Kingdom. Therefore, diversity in this scenario has led to the potential paradox of greater unity in the union state. By contrast Heath *et al* argue that the nation is a cultural rather than a legal concept (1999: 157). When observed in cultural terms, Britishness can be seen to be going through a process of change. In 2010, Bradbury and Andrews compared the responses on identity in the British Social Attitudes survey from 1996 to 2005 to discover any changing patterns in identity. They found that 52% of respondents in 1996 described themselves as British, while this number dropped to 44% in 2005 (Bradbury and Andrews, 2010: 229-230). This number rose to 47% in the 2013 British Social Attitudes survey. One reason for the decrease in Britishness since the 1990s is due to 'evidence that devolution elsewhere in the UK has sharpened people's appreciation' of the differences between Britishness and other national identities within the United Kingdom (British Social Attitudes, 2014). These figures are concerning for the British state when one addresses state legitimacy through national identity (Vebra, 1965).

If British identity is losing support, why is this the case? For political scientists such as Beck (2000) and Barber (2003), national identity is being made redundant through globalisation as our world becomes increasingly smaller and more connected, particularly when one looks at the supra-national union of the European Union. From another perspective, immigration has also been stated as a cause for the decline of Britishness as the ethnic landscape of the United Kingdom is pluralising (Gilroy, 1997; Parekh, 2006). For Tilley and Heath (2007: 663), decline in British identity is a result of three factors: societal changes, 'period' specific changes

such as devolution and a change in attitudes through the generations. Within the last few decades of the twentieth century and the early twenty-first century there has been an increasing rise in regional identities and a decrease in Britishness (Heath and Roberts, 2006: 2). When observing changing attitudes in regards to identity in the Scottish and British Social Attitudes Surveys, Bechhoffer and McCrone found that there was a marked difference when individuals were forced to choose one national identity compared to allowing them a multiple choice. In their study they found that while 52 individuals choose British as part of a multiple choice answer on identity, only 14 choose Britishness as a forced choice (Bechhofer and McCrone, 2007: 254). This was even more marked in Scotland when looking at the contrast between Scottish and British identity. In 1974, 65 individuals stated Scottish as a forced choice identity and 31 choose British, while in 2005 76 individuals choose Scottish identity and only 15 stated Britishness (Bechhofer and McCrone, 2007: 254). This is interesting as these findings show a clear rise in support for Scottish national identity following Scottish devolution, with the year 2000 showing the largest support for Scottish identity with 80 participants stating it as their forced choice national identity compared to 13 British (Bechhofer and McCrone, 2007: 254). What this shows is that there is clear support for devolution within Scotland and that this has helped to promote and to strengthen Scottish national identity.

Research is increasingly finding that the Anglo-centric version of British identity is fast losing its appeal, not just among the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish, but also among the English, the very demographic whom it is most likely to apply to and hold meaning for (Rojek, 2007: 8-9). Therefore, as national cultural identities prevail, is Britishness in terminal decline? This has led to a revised attitude to how identity within the UK should be perceived. Within a modern context, this can be understood via Millar and Ali's (2014: 253) example that:

> 'Someone with a strong Scottish national identity may well favour independence for Scotland … The same person may also be unwilling to assert that she would rather be a citizen of Britain than of any other country

> – since what she would like most is to be a citizen of *Scotland*'. (Millar and Ali, 2014: 253).

Even with such measures, whether Britishness can be maintained as the constitutional identity of the United Kingdom is open to debate. Quite possibly this is a matter of too little, too late in regards to retaining British identity as the overarching sense of affinity and solidarity that binds the Union together, as too often the owl of Minerva spreads its wings at dusk. Yet it may not be too late for the United Kingdom. Three years ago the risk of an independent Scotland still felt very real. Unfortunately for Scottish separatists the European referendum of 2016 has pushed concerns over this to one side. Yet it must be noted, as it has been by Preston (2008), that the arguments that were made by Scottish nationalist surrounding independence are not irrational. These views cannot simply be ignored. The temporising 'no' given by Prime Minister Theresa May (Stewart *et al*, 2017) in denying the Scottish a second independence referendum may have put this fear to rest for the time being, but using the authority of the national parliament to prevent the people of Scotland having another say on their constitutional position may further weaken the frameworks which bind Scotland to the rest of the United Kingdom.

Difference between groups is a core trigger when it comes to an individual's awareness of their identity (Britishness and Belonging survey, 2005: 45). Culturally and socially the nations of the United Kingdom are different from each other, such as the cultural significance of the 12th July commemorations to *Ulster* Unionists in Northern Ireland, and this may trigger a rise in regional identities. Yet often these identities can be held simultaneously with Britishness. In recent decades the United Kingdom has witnessed both a cultural resurgence of Britishness through the success of events such as the 2012 Olympics and an increased prevalence of regional national identities. To maintain the monopoly of identity which has historically been held by Britishness within the United Kingdom is an increasingly difficult task. Previous Prime Minister David Cameron stated that Britain is founded upon a 'historically constituted identity' (Daddow, 2015: 83). If this is the case, why

has the trend in recent years been to return to the individual history of each region rather than promoting a common nationwide history of identity? Langlands (1999: 54) synopsised, 'is Britishness a political and territorial identity or does it operate on civic and ethnic levels at the same time?' He further outlined this in his statement that 'the nation is an historically recent artefact arising out of specific modern conditions', purporting that the history used to promote Britishness across the United Kingdom is socially constructed and is construed specifically towards the goal of endorsing British national identity as the metanarrative of identity within the Union (Langlands, 1999: 54). As observed by Lynch (1999: 3), no matter how hard the political centre has tried in recent years to promote Britishness within the Union, 'the enduring ethnic, cultural and political facets of old allegiances were never far below the surface of British identity'. This departure to traditional regional identities signified a move back from the progression of the Union as a coherent political entity, to a quasi-federal system of political engagement. According to Cohen (1994: 255), it is traditional for identity to be 'transmitted as an oral tradition within entire communities', alluding that the restitution to regional identities could portray a return to smaller more inclusive identities. Kimberlee (2002: 95) argued this also has an effect on the political engagement of young people by distorting support for the traditional three big parties while increasing support for regional nationalist parties.

Why should regional and national identities within the United Kingdom be in competition with each other? Regional identities are a core part of the British identity and without them it would look very different. Therefore, regional and national identity within the United Kingdom should be visualised as a train track approach as it is a concept of identity in parallel (Jacobson, 1997: 196). Both are needed to contribute to Britishness as we know it. Hitchens (2008: 44) contends that:

> 'Most of us were born yesterday, to all intents and purposes. The lore of our tribe, the stories of our ancestors, the memories which our parents held in common, have simply ceased to be'.

In other words as society progresses the historical, political and cultural bonds which in the past tied people to a common sense of British identity are breaking, resulting in a revival of more insular regional identities. Yet even with the studies discussed in this section showing that Britishness is on the decrease as a first choice identity, it still remains a vital element of people's identity when they have been allowed to choose it alongside other identities. If postmodernity teaches us that metanarratives are collapsing and that individuals are taking a more pick and mix approach to concepts such as religion and identity, why can Britishness not conceivably be viewed as a 'moveable feast', the flexibility of which is its key strength (Hall, 1992: 309)? Unique national identities are not a crucial aspect of a nation as history, culture and politics do not affect all members of a nation equally (Cophen 1994: 192). When using Northern Ireland as an example one can observe that different ethnic groups have different historical, cultural and political backgrounds that are not representative of everyone within the nation. While members of the Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist community celebrate the 12th July annually in commemoration of the 1690 Battle of the Boyne, many members of the Catholic/Nationalist/Republican community see this as an attack on their own history and culture. Therefore, a one size fits all approach to shared history and culture does not exist within Northern Ireland. The situation is more complex and as a result so is national identity.

Within Scotland and Wales there is a clear duality of identity in that an individual can be both Scottish or Welsh and British; can the same be said of the English? (Osmond, 1988: 26. Or does the Anglicisation of Britishness mean that to be English and British are viewed as one and the same? As observed by Kearney (1989: 2), historians, particularly those of an English background, tend to use the terms British and English interchangeably. This nation-based perception of British history can be misleading as not only does it promote England as the dominant power within the union at the expense of the other nations, it also fails to acknowledge the contribution that other nations have had towards building the British national identity. The impact of the interchangeable use of British and English in regards to

national history was further examined by Robbins (1998: 284) who stated that many institutions such as galleries and museums in England are described as either 'British' or 'National' and are subsequently taken by England to represent the nation (Mcleod, 2013: 650). The same however cannot be said for their counterparts in Scotland and Wales, where national institutions are taken to mean of that nation and not of Britain as a whole.

The perceived weakening of British national identity was an area of concern for New Labour since the 1990s. The Labour Party believed that Britain needed to recognise ethnic minorities and to create more social inclusion and that this could be achieved through national identity and as a result Labour put citizenship on the national curriculum in England (Haesly, 2005: 66; Crick, 2002: 493). Devolution itself was an attempt by the Labour Party to modernise Britain by allowing regions to have political and cultural autonomy over themselves (Haesly, 2005: 65). Britishness as a concept has so many dimensions. It is simultaneously a political, legal, social and emotional question (Grube, 2011: 628). Trying to applying Britishness to the whole of the United Kingdom as a method of enhancing social cohesion is a somewhat difficult task, but one that Gordon Brown attempted in 2006 during a speech at the Fabian Future of Britishness conference. Brown stated that a promotion of shared *values* could be used to increase national pride in Britain and to create a sense of belonging within individuals towards the United Kingdom (2006). Nairn is not an advocate of Brown's views on Britishness, arguing that Britishness is merely a remnant from the days of the Empire (2006: 37). Perryman (2008: 8) believes Brown's perception of identity to be 'the most backward, defensive and narrow version' of Britishness. His views conjure images of primordial displays of Unionism and Britishness, of union flags and shared values. Is this truly representative of the Britishness of the United Kingdom? In Northern Ireland maybe, these critics argued, but not in Great Britain. Brown asked the questions of identity which should be asked, yet does his answer fit the bill? To state that shared values can result in a sense of belonging and national pride is only answering a small section of the question. If one where to look at Britishness as

being both civic and ethnic as observed by Parekh (2000), then a celebration of shared values is simply not enough to create cohesion. National identity is partisan, as values emerge from traditions and history, yet belonging does not always mean sharing the same views or sense of history (Parekh, 2000: 7:8). For example, many within Northern Ireland do not share the same perception of certain historical events with others within the United Kingdom. One may change political community, but cannot change their ethnic belonging (Parekh, 2002: 304). Therefore answers to the identity question must be achieved in a way that is inclusive to all within the union state. As Shaw has stated, now is the time to ask people what Britishness is, not to theorise about it (2008: 596).

It must be acknowledged that without careful contemplation, conversations surrounding British identity can quickly develop into debates concerning 'not national identity as such, but commitment to the Union – a very different matter' (Millar and Ali, 2014: 253). While identity within the United Kingdom has changed, the imagined community that is Britain has not yet disappeared (Haesly, 2005: 81). Identity is not a fixed concept, hence it is described within this thesis as a paradox. It is neither fixed or fluid, but a blend of both aspects (Parekh, 2000: 5). Britishness can be examined in different forms of thinking, particularly in regards to the aspects of constitutional, social and economic unions which together form a whole.

2.4: British questions

In order to fully address the issues of Britishness, the future of the Union and the relationship between *Ulster* Unionism and the United Kingdom, a more detailed approach to examining Britishness must be applied. Three key distinctions can be made: the constitutional union, the social union and the economic union. Each refers to an important aspect of both the Union and Britishness which have traditionally been viewed in the paradoxical terms of allegiance and identity, contract and solidarity, and instrumentalism and non-instrumentalism. The conceptual framework of elective affinity will be used to re-imagine these

paradoxes into a concept of Britishness, one which will be proposed as an all-encompassing approach to understanding the nature of Britishness within Northern Ireland and which will be tested empirically in the responses of Unionist representatives in Part Two of this thesis.

2.4.1: The constitutional union of the United Kingdom

The constitutional union can be addressed using the framework of allegiance and identity (Aughey, 2010c). At its most basic level, a constitution is a set of institutions. In the case of the United Kingdom this refers to the British parliament at Westminster. Vernon Bogdanor (2009) observed that the constitution at this base level refers to having political representation at Westminster (see Chapter Two, section 2.2). This was also outlined by the Royal Commission in 1973 which recommended that the number of Northern Irish Members of Parliament should increase to ensure that it is in line with the rest of the United Kingdom (MacKintosh, 1974: 122). While at first this may seem overly simplistic, it can in fact be seen in practice. This understanding would explain why representatives from Sinn Fein refuse to take their seats in Westminster, as to do so would be seen as not only acknowledging Britishness as an identity but also acknowledging allegiance to, and legitimacy of, the United Kingdom. Bogdanor's view can also explain why the Scottish Nationalist Party aims to replace allegiance to the Crown at Westminster with allegiance to (the Crown at) Holyrood, integrating political allegiance and Scottish national identity in an independent Scotland. However, the term constitution can also be understood as having an identification with a set of values, in this case those of Britishness. Gordon Brown was a strong advocate of defining Britishness as a set of values, for example in a speech at the Commonwealth Club in London the importance of British identity. According to Brown British identity can be viewed in two ways, both as the institutions like the monarchy, but also through British values such as 'British tolerance, the British belief in liberty and the British sense of fair play' (2006). What Brown is saying in this speech is that the allegiance aspect is not enough, one also needs to promote a

sense of common and shared identity to bring a nation together. What the allegiance/identity framework allows is that the Northern Irish, the Scottish and the Welsh retain their own unique regional identity culturally while also maintaining their allegiance to the United Kingdom politically and together, politically and culturally, there is a clear set of shared values. Colin Kidd argued this point within the Scottish context, ironically arguing that Unionism can be used a method of protecting regional identities within the United Kingdom against English influence, and not as a means of English imperialism imposed upon the regions as Nairn has argued (2008; 1977).

Traditionally, the British constitution has been positively understood as a revered, almost mythical, entity that is almost globally unique in that it is an unwritten document, or at least historically it has been. Allegiance to the Union has been traditionally achieved through the political obligation to the state (Aughey, 2010c: 337). Like nationalism, the British constitution appears as a conversation between the ages, a noble ideal like a living creature, evolving and adapting depending on the political climate. One development from this lack of constitutional clarity is the surprising amount of flexibility that this has allowed the separate nations when it came to their own identities. As Colley (2014: 90) explained, 'The fact that this was a flexible and in many respects only a partial union helps to explain why it has endured for so long'. Elazar's balance between 'self rule' and 'shared rule' provides a perfect introduction to devolution and the impact that this has had on both the United Kingdom and British national identity. According to Gordon Brown in 1992, devolution would strengthen both the United Kingdom politically and Britishness culturally by creating 'a community of citizens with common needs, mutual interests, shared objectives, related goals and most of all linked destinies.' What this means in practice is that political allegiance within the three devolved regions is split: the regions are now both allegiant to their own devolved assemblies or parliaments, whilst also retaining allegiance to the national parliament at Westminster. This concept of simultaneous allegiance is beneficial to the United Kingdom as it cements the Union as a multi-national state and strengthens it through the continued elected support of its constituent member parts. These

allegiances now supplement a feeling of affinity towards the Parliament at Westminster. In the case of devolution and the United Kingdom this allows regional identities to grow and flourish whilst also maintaining the over-arching identity of Britishness.

The intention of devolution was to create the space for conversations surrounding identity and belonging to be discussed on a more public and multi-national platform. It also brings to the fore questions surrounding elective affinity (see Chapter Four, section 4.3). It is not enough to *elect* to be a part of the Union as the people of Scotland have discovered recently. The regions must also *want* the Union to continue. This is where allegiance *and* identity plays a huge role in the continuation of the United Kingdom. As observed by Aughey, allegiance and identity may be different in many ways, but they are not unrelated (2010c, 342).

As discussed in Chapter Two, section 2.2, there has been a fear within British political elites that devolution could, by contrast, result in a breakup of the United Kingdom (Lynch, 1999: 112). This theory is not new and can trace its roots back to political thinkers such as Tom Nairn in the 1970s. Despite the decades spent pondering this 'inevitability', the Union remains. The theory was *almost* proven during the 2014 Scottish independence referendum, when 45% of the Scottish population voted to remove Scotland from the United Kingdom. However, with a 'No' vote of 55% this did not materialise, yet the relatively close result showed that the debate has not been settled definitely. Territorial politics will continue to frame academic discussions of Britishness and the Union for the foreseeable future (Bradbury and Andrews, 2010: 247). The referendum also had the impact of conveying to politicians across the United Kingdom that the stability of the Union was more fragile than imagined, and that a delicate political and cultural balance is required to maintain the threads which bind the regions together. The changing structure and increasingly diverse nature of the United Kingdom as a whole must also be considered in regards to what is meant by Britishness and how this is maintained in civic and political life.

If one looks at devolution through the lens of the allegiant/identity framework devolution's function is to reconcile both allegiance and identity within the United Kingdom. Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales all now have their own devolved parliament or assembly. This allows them a degree of political and financial self-governance, political recognition of their own distinctive regional identities yet maintaining overall allegiance to the polity of the United Kingdom through representation at Westminster. In the case of the union state of the United Kingdom, both regional devolution and the continuation of political representation at the national parliament may be the best method to achieve this within a framework of multi-national identities. The key political purpose of devolution was the accommodation - by democratic containment - of claims to popular sovereignty and the establishment of institutional bounds to separatist tendencies (Aughey, 2007b: 140).

When researching ideas of constitutional impacts on British identity, it is impossible not to mention the role of the monarchy. As outlined by Colley (2014: 43), the term 'The United *Kingdom'* itself highlights the core place of the monarchy within the Union. Throughout the history of the United Kingdom, the monarchy has played a central role in both British national identity and national allegiance – as Rose (1982) argued the Crown is the closest that the United Kingdom comes to a theory of the state. According to Bogdanor (1995: 307), the monarchy plays many roles within the United Kingdom, from being a pillar of the British constitution, to being a symbol of the nation. The influence of the monarchy regarding British national identity was examined by Stevenson and Abell in their 2011 study. In response participants stated that the 2002 Jubilee had highlighted the importance of the monarchy as a component of British national identity (Stevenson and Abell, 2011: 135). The monarchy also plays an important role in the promotion of Britishness outside of the United Kingdom. While British influence across the world declined after the end of the Empire, the profile of the British monarchy is still high (Osmond, 1988: 23; Cannadine, 1983: 102).

The symbolic importance of the monarchy not just among the English, but also to those in the devolved institutions was evident in First Minister of Scotland Alex Salmond's statement that even if the referendum resulted in a "Yes" vote, that it was his wish for the Royal family to continue as the monarchs of Scotland. What the Scottish National Party wished to do through independence was to split the constitutional allegiance of the United Kingdom away from political identity by ending their representation at Westminster, yet at the same time they actively wished to retain formal allegiance to the Crown. By removing their allegiance from the United Kingdom to Scotland, Scottish Nationalists were aiming to provide legitimacy for their newly independent state. This would be in tandem with, but distinct from, their role as head of state of the rest of the United Kingdom (Colley, 2014: 51). For the Scottish Nationalist Party (SNP) it was political, as a means of appealing beyond the natural base of nationalist support, to retain the Queen as the head of state and thus attracting the potential support of those (Unionists) for whom the monarchy was part of their social and cultural *Scottish* identity. It would ease the break from the UK constitutionally if the identity of Scottish would remain linked still to allegiance to the Crown.

While the European Union impacts upon the British constitutional union, it differs from the United Kingdom in numerous ways. First, it is a union of very distinctive nations that came together through trade agreements and beneficial shared policy. There is a component of elective affinity to the European Union in that member states choose to become members via popular democracy such as referendums. For the United Kingdom, this referendum took place in 1975 when the electorate where asked for their opinion on staying within the then European Economic Community. Yet while the elective component exists, has the European Union succeeded in including the affinity component as well? The European Union has never succeeded in developing a supranational sense of European identity. According to Shore (2004) the European Union has grossly underestimated the ingrained sense of belonging that develops from national identities by making the mistake of thinking that they are created unnaturally and could therefore be

replaced with a European identity. This is a major way in how the European Union and the United Kingdom differ (see Chapter Seven for a fuller examination of these differences in *Ulster* Unionism etc). The European Union has never fully developed this sense of affinity within its member states and as a result, the United Kingdom voted to leave the European Union on the 26th June 2016. This other union will be discussed within Chapter Seven.

2.4.2: The social union of the United Kingdom

When looking for a conceptual link to tie a discussion of the social union into this thesis, nothing fits quite so well as the themes of contract and solidarity as without a shared sense of solidarity between the regions of the United Kingdom the implied constitutional contracts which form the Union would not survive for long (Aughey, 2001a). For example, if one were to look at the Scottish Nationalist Party's policies during the independence referendum campaign, one would observe that it wished to break the contractual connections to the Union (elective/allegiant) whilst maintaining the social, cultural and economic connections (affinity/solidarity). Like the object of retaining the monarchy, the concern of the SNP with the 'social union' but not 'political union' was a means of softening the break with the UK, a practical affinity to make the transition from part of the Union to an independent state easier for the people of Scotland. However, as this thesis has argued, it identified the great contradiction in the strategy of the independence campaign which was never resolved and which continued to dog the arguments for a second referendum.

The relationships between the regions of the United Kingdom contain elements of contract. This can be observed through the principle of consent in Northern Ireland and by the decision of 55% of the Scottish electorate to remain a part of the United Kingdom (Aughey, 2001a: 476). When looking at academic discussions of the contract and solidarity framework of the Union, Aughey stated in 2010 that

Scotland would be the test of this. This did indeed happen in 2014 with the Scottish independence referendum. For this contract to work it must be more than a mere bargain. The Union to survive must be rather like Hegel's idea of marriage - 'a contract to transcend the point of contract' (cited Avineri, 2002: 139). According to Clarke (1990: 32), national identity is influenced more by shared history than by economics. This endows British identity with a solid foundation within history and shared cultural experiences, whilst helping to promote a common bond within all the regions of the United Kingdom. British identity, therefore, can be further understood as being an 'allegiance to common institutions, a shared history and a political culture which fosters common values' (Lynch, 1999: 5). Rather than remain stagnant, union states must provide a sense of belonging to those who live within them. Conversely, nationalist movements within the United Kingdom aim to promote their cause by using history. By constantly reasserting their history as separate events from the rest of the United Kingdom, nationalist movements reinvigorate previously less dominant identities such as Scottishness or Welshness into larger self-defining identities that become primary to those who live in the regions. Hastings (1997: 3) outlined this by stating that those who live within states are not simply 'subjects', but are actually an integral part of the state. This grants the people of a nation the opportunity to influence and adapt their own national identity, depending on the current historical, cultural and political situation. Clarke (1990: 32) has asked the question, 'Is Britain special?' Perhaps a more fitting question would be: Is British identity special enough to survive? Whether this flexibility can continue to promote and preserve British national identity is yet unanswered.

However, this flexible nature of Britishness can also be viewed as a weakness. The United Kingdom, as described previously in this chapter, does not have a codified constitution. What this means in practice is that the contractual bonds which connect the Union are heavily reliant on feelings of solidarity and affinity to hold them together, what Brown tried to re-define as values. As there is no clear constitutional grounding for much of what Britishness is, it depends on a sense of

solidarity to connect the regions and to promote sharing of resources and opportunities, the very economic 'values' which Brown spoke of. This is difficult to achieve whenever one looks at the diversity and unity components of the United Kingdom. Each region has a diverse idea of what it means to be British, therefore how can Britishness be used to promote solidarity? This theme will be examined in more detail in Chapter Six of this thesis when it looks at the responses of *Ulster* Unionists on Britishness and their connection to the Union.

During the establishment of the United Kingdom and the creation of a shared national identity, religion has played a significant role in bringing the four nations together under a common identity. The influence of religion within the structure of national identity is best understood when examined through a sociological perspective. Emile Durkheim, the influential French sociologist, outlined the role religion had to play in the forming of national identities. For Durkheim, the major function of religion was to bind individuals in a society (Giddens, 1972: 219). This was achieved through outlining what behaviours are acceptable in society and how to interact with others. As Harrison (2013: 533) argued, the principles of protestant Christianity allowed people to feel for others. This ability to connect acts as the social glue that fastens the United Kingdom. As argued by Bellah, civic religion also plays a major role within national identities. This is evident in the United States of America, where religious elements can be observed within public culture (Storm, 2011: 830). Cultural events in the United Kingdom also promote this sense of civic religion. Hervieu-Léger (2000: 157) further contributed to this area by introducing the concept of 'ethnic religion' (Storm, 2011: 831).

According to Pocock (1993: 8), the Protestant Revolution of 1688-1689 allowed for the unification of the church, monarchy and parliament. This in turn allowed for the union of the predominantly Protestant nations of England, Wales and Scotland over time; a union that was cemented with the establishment of the Anglican Church in England and Wales and the Presbyterian Church in Scotland (Bryant, 2006: 34). It was also conceived as a shared interest and a common bond between

the three regions that would make an overall national identity entrenched in Protestantism easier to promote above the traditional regional identities.

Yet religion has also played a divisive role within the United Kingdom. For most of the history the United Kingdom this has taken the shape of non-conformity versus Anglicanism, a debate that was only replaced within the 20th century by the emergence of class politics. The relationship between Ireland and the United Kingdom has always been characterised as a contest between competing religious outlooks and led in 1921 to the creation of the Irish Free State and Northern Ireland. Within Northern Ireland there is still conflict between minority communities and the United Kingdom over religion. Unlike with the rest of the regions, the role played by religion in the 1800 Act of Union with Ireland was different. Although Ireland contained a minority Protestant population, the main reason for bringing it into the Union was a strategic move in regards to the defence of the nation. Many commentators, such as Colley and Storm, have stated that Protestantism within the Union was an important way of separating the identity of the nation from Catholic Europe and Ireland (Colley, 1992: 316; Storm, 2011: 830). At this time, Great Britain was vulnerable to attack and invasion from its close proximity to mainland Catholic Europe, a position which left Great Britain's rulers and military leaders under constant fear of attack. Being an island nation could not even prevent Great Britain from invasion, as previous British history has documented on numerous occasions. For any possible invasion from Europe, Ireland was the perfect side door into Great Britain for two reasons. First, as a Catholic nation Ireland was sympathetic to Europe and would be inclined to help as a base in attacking Great Britain. Second, the close proximity to Great Britain made Ireland an excellent base from which attacking forces from Europe could invade. Therefore the 1800 Act of Union was as much about protecting Great Britain and British self-interests as it was about further promoting the expansion of Britishness that was on-going at this time.

2.4.3: The economic union of the United Kingdom

When examining the economic union between the regions of the United Kingdom it may at first seem like a purely instrumental agreement. However, the United Kingdom cannot be viewed in only instrumental terms as this does not look favourably upon the future of the Union (Aughey, 2010a). Instrumental terms can be broken so long as the Union no longer holds any benefits for the nations involved, but once a non-instrumental component is added belonging within the United Kingdom it becomes a much more primordial aspect with individuals wanting to remain within it because they feel a sense of innate belonging.

The real 'nitty gritty' aspects of the economic union, such as the calculation and distribution of the Barnett Formula, the use of shared currency through the pound sterling and United Kingdom wide trade agreements are all instrumental in that the regions enter into these contracts for the economic stability and benefits which they provide. Yet the economic union also contains strong non-instrumental elements as well. The pooling of resources across the United Kingdom can only be done through the legitimacy of the Union. This legitimacy is provided through the shared sense of belonging and affinity which the regions feel towards the Union – as in the 'social union'. The structure of the United Kingdom provides financial security to each of the four regions. The present method of distributing finance around the United Kingdom was developed by Joel Barnett in 1978 and his formula was named after him (Bryant, 2006: 54). The Barnett Formula has come under increasing fire in recent years due to the amount of public spending per capita that is given to the devolved regions of the United Kingdom at the expense of England. Figures from 2012/2013 show public spending per head throughout the United Kingdom as such: England £8,529; Scotland £10,152; Wales £9,709 and Northern Ireland £10,876 (Shepherd, 2014). This in itself causes much discontent among those in England who believe they are getting a poorer deal. During the Scottish independence referendum, much discussion was held around the perceived inequality of this financial arrangement. The financial position of Scotland is now

worse than that of the United Kingdom as a whole, with a deficit of 9.5% compared to the United Kingdom's 4% (Mahoney, 2016). The situation is such that 'Scotland now receives £1,200 per head more in spending while raising £400 per head less in revenues', weakening any arguments that Scotland is economically strong enough to become independent (Mahoney, 2016).

One of the most perceptible benefits of the Union is that of the system of welfare that has been developed within the United Kingdom. The United Kingdom has always been proud of its National Health Service, the means by which individuals are entitled to free health care. This is an extremely costly policy for the government, with the National Health Service in England alone costing an estimate of £115.4 billion for the year 2015/2016 (NHS, 2015). As stated by Budge *et al* (2007: 596), the British government is under constant pressure to reform these services.

Recent proposed changes to the welfare system have also caused disparities between the Westminster government and the devolved regions. In England, the Welfare Reform Act (formally Bill) was passed by the then Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition in 2012. However, this Act met with political unease in Northern Ireland. Since it was first introduced to the Stormont Assembly, the Welfare Reform Act has been a divisive issue between Sinn Fein and the Democratic Unionist Party, the two largest parties. The Sinn Fein position is that the proposed cuts to the welfare system are 'totally unacceptable' (Sinn Fein, 2015: 10). The Democratic Unionist Party, however, takes a different approach to welfare reform, arguing that the Conservative cuts do need to be implemented, but that this does not necessarily mean that the Act should be implemented without change. Already this debate has put strain on the relationship between Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom, with discussions being held to deliberate the possibility of removing devolved powers over welfare away from Stormont and placed back into the care of Westminster. This was an interesting political situation from the

position of the instrument and non-instrumental framework within which this section on the economic union is framed. The proposed changes to the Welfare Act can be viewed in terms of an instrumental agreement that would be imposed by the national government. Nationalists do not want this agreement, nor do they feel any non-instrumental reasons as to why they should. For Unionists on the other hand, the instrumental reason behind the Welfare Act were important and should be implemented, but not in their entirety and not without change. What is interesting is that even though Unionists accept that some of the changes must be introduced for instrumental reasons, the social and cultural scenario in Northern Ireland is different from that of mainland Great Britain and therefore Northern Ireland would need an adapted form of the Welfare Act. Once again, this is a case of unity in diversity. The Welfare Act may be different across the regions of the United Kingdom, but the very distribution of expenditure and the substance of the welfare state itself relies on a sense of commonality and equity which is non-instrumental.

2.5: Conclusion

What this current period of rapid constitutional change offers academia is a unique opportunity to study the effects of complex constitutional and political change on a complex social identity such as Britishness. If times have changed it is therefore appropriate to revisit *Ulster* Unionism as its concerns are no longer at the 'edge of the Union' (Bruce, 1994) but at the centre of it due to the recent rise in identity politics within the United Kingdom and through the Conservative/Democratic Unionist Party deal of 2017. The position of *Ulster* Unionists within the United Kingdom at this time allows for a fascinating and in-depth case study of this phenomenon. It is an intriguing and contradictory position which *Ulster* Unionists now find themselves in within the United Kingdom. They are simultaneously more involved with central British politics than they have been in years, whilst also once again finding themselves distinctly at the edge of the Union. The deal between the Democratic Unionist Party and the Conservative government following the snap election of 2017 has placed a level of political influence on *Ulster* Unionism that has

significantly raised its profile and power within the central political institutions of the United Kingdom. This a case of the central British political institutions accepting Northern Ireland and *Ulster* Unionists as a core component of the Union, as Theresa May made the following statement on the 13th July 2016 after she had become Prime Minister:

> 'we believe in the Union: the precious, precious bond between England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. But it means something else that is just as important; it means we believe in a union not just between the nations of the United Kingdom but between all of our citizens, every one of us, whoever we are and wherever we're from' (May, 2016).

Yet *Ulster* Unionism is also once again caught in a position of being distinctive from the rest of the United Kingdom because of the territorial issues surrounding Northern Ireland as a contested region. This can be observed through the ongoing concerns surrounding the role of Northern Ireland in a post-Brexit United Kingdom and conversations about the role of the Irish government in the affairs of Northern Ireland. British identity within *Ulster* Unionism is a complex and often contradictory identity and it is the argument of this thesis that its character has been understood in contradictory ways but that these 'contradictions' can be resolved (at least partially) by a more synthetic approach. Aspects of any complex identity can be distinctive and particular (*Ulster* Unionism) and other aspects of it representative of a larger whole (Britishness).

Doing justice to what is both distinctive and representative is a challenge when addressing any identity. For example, criticisms made of Gordon Brown's attempt to define 'Britishness' a decade ago were twofold. On the one hand, his definition of British values were too generic to be specific and on the other hand, his definition was actually too distinctive – that these were not British examples but *English* values (Brown, 2007). It is one of the themes of this thesis that much of the literature on *Ulste*r Unionism has been concerned with what is distinctive about its character rather than what is also representative of wider British values or

experience. This thesis will demonstrate the substance of this claim through the conceptual framework of elective affinity and by the analysis of data gathered from interviews with Unionist politicians. What differentiates this research from others is that is it observing British identity and Unionism at a time when Northern Ireland is no longer the biggest threat to the continuation of the Union. The political conflicts of Unionism versus Nationalism are no longer the property of Northern Ireland, but are currently being played out within Scotland following the 2014 Scottish independence referendum and its aftermath. When it comes to issues of identity, nationhood and the future of the United Kingdom, Northern Ireland is no longer on the peripheral of these questions but central.

Chapter Three

Paradoxes of Unionism

3.1: Introduction

The previous chapter has examined the general nature of Britishness in the United Kingdom. This was achieved by addressing the questions of 'What is Britishness?', and how it relates to the spheres of constitutional, social and economic union. Discussion has been given to the changing nature of British politics as the traditional model of class politics has been significantly modified by the re-emergence of the 'territorial dimension' and questions of identity (see Chapter Two, section 2.2; Walker, 2010: 236; Mandler, 2006: 283). While the history of Great Britain has been predominantly concerned with Pulzer's (1967) famous statement that 'Class is the basis of British party politics; all else is embellishment and detail', it is true that the same cannot be said for Northern Ireland. The territorial dimension which was first raised by Richard Rose and other theorists 40 years ago raises important questions of nation, identity and belonging within the United Kingdom. One thing though is for certain: 'Britain was not invented; it developed' through a combination of both allegiance and identity towards the union state (Clarke, 2000: 275). To fully understand the nature of Britishness in the twenty-first century United Kingdom it is necessary to move away from the general towards the particular, the particular in this case study being Northern Ireland. Does Northern Ireland disprove the common rules of Britishness and is *Ulster* Unionism an exception to the rule? Or does Northern Ireland illustrate how Britishness and Unionism involve logical affinities? The question of identity has been of core constitutional, social and economic importance in Northern Ireland since its creation in 1921 (McCrone, 2002: 316). From being considered by generations of scholars to be marginal to British politics, Northern Ireland, and in particular *Ulster* Unionism, has now found itself front and centre of British politics. This will be examined through a discussion of the paradoxical positions of allegiance and identity in the academic literature on Britishness and Unionism. From this

literature, key questions will be abstracted for further examination later in the thesis.

3.2: The paradoxes of allegiance

The study of Unionism is one that can be described through the paradox of allegiance to the United Kingdom. This will be addressed via a comparison of both political and historical theories of Unionism and allegiance to the Union. On the one hand, theorists such as Miller argue that *Ulster* Unionism does not belong to the traditional concept of Britishness (1978). McLean and McMillan also state that *Ulster* Unionism is an exception to Britishness, yet ironically they argue that this is because it is *too* British, making the point that Northern Ireland being 'more British than Finchley' reveals how un-British it really is (2005). In contrast to this, John Bew provides a historical argument as to why Northern Ireland is in fact representative of British allegiance. An examination will also be provided of Richard Rose's thesis 'Is the United Kingdom a State?' in order to gain further insight into the questions of Northern Ireland, *Ulster* Unionism, statehood and allegiance.

When examining literature on *Ulster* Unionism, it is interesting to observe that there are contrasting interpretative lenses through which Unionism in Northern Ireland - and British allegiance - can be observed (Rose, 1971; Miller, 1978; O'Malley, 1983; Todd, 1987). For Miller in *Queen's Rebels* (1978), Unionists from Northern Ireland are distinctive from the rest of the United Kingdom and do not fit into traditional templates of British politics or what it means to be British. Basically, Unionists from Northern Ireland are not truly British enough to deserve the title of British. Miller looks at Northern Irish Unionism from a historical viewpoint and makes the interesting observation that *Ulster* Unionism can be viewed as a form of nationalism that developed as a result of Unionist fears surrounding Home Rule. What Miller is arguing in *Queen's Rebels* is that *Ulster* Unionism is a paradox. It is

both loyal to the Crown and to itself, 'A substantial section of the Protestant population often seems to be loudly proclaiming its loyalty to the Queen while simultaneously declining to submit to her government' (Miller, 1978: 1). This perceived paradox of British identity in *Ulster* Unionism I suggest can be reconciled by the concept of elective affinity and which can explain the seemingly irreconcilable contradictions which exist in the relationship between *Ulster* Unionism and the United Kingdom (see Chapter Four, section 4.3). Britishness within *Ulster* Unionism can remain distinctive, but Unionism still elects to be a part of the Union and more so, it believes itself to be a part of the Union, socially, economically as well as constitutionally. Britishness in Northern Ireland is viewed as a means of supporting the Union, but can it also be more than this? (McCrone, 2002: 310).

For Miller, Ulster Protestantism becomes particularly interesting when ones tries to observe it through the frameworks of 'one-nation' and 'two-nations' (1978: 44). It is through this framing that Miller outlines the main paradoxes between Ulster Protestants and the rest of the United Kingdom, stating:

> 'Are they saying that Protestant Ulster is a distinct nation like Scotland and Wales within a multi-national community, the United Kingdom? Or are they saying that the human community embraced by the United Kingdom is a "nation", of which Ulster Protestants consider themselves members?' (1978: 45-46).

To put this within the language of this thesis, are Unionists British, or do they just *think* that they are British? To Miller, neither of these explanations quite describes this relationship. To see each region of the United Kingdom as distinctive, yet united is a core belief within this thesis, yet for Miller Ulster Protestantism does not fit within this. Rather, he notes that:

> 'The Ulster Protestant community is like Scotland (before the recent rise of nationalist separatism in Scotland) in that it has exhibited no clear determination to be politically separated from the United Kingdom. On the other hand, it is unlike Scotland in that whereas Scottish national feeling has until recently been fully compatible with a sense of "British" nationality legitimising the Westminster regime, the Ulster Protestant community has

> evoked a kind of group loyalty incompatible with acceptance of the full implications of British nationality' (1978: 46).

Therefore, as they are not unconditionally loyal to Westminster, they cannot truly be seen as being British.

When writing the introduction for the second edition of *Queen's Rebels*, Bew noted that Miller made the argument that a lack of Nationalism within *Ulster* Unionism is what has led to its problems over identity and belonging within the United Kingdom (2007: xiv). Yet was this lack of Nationalism based upon a lack of national identity, or a crisis of identity? Both of these possibilities will be examined in Chapter Three, section 3.4 and Chapter Four. He also noted:

> 'Why were Ulster loyalists unable to articulate their position in a way that people outside Northern Ireland, particularly in the rest of the United Kingdom, could fully comprehend, let alone sympathise with?' (Bew, 2007, ix).

This will be addressed within this thesis. Why are Unionists and their Britishness seen as different within the United Kingdom, even though they themselves believe that they truly are British? As Bew stated in his conclusion, now is the time to re-evaluate Miller's arguments (2007: xxii).

Southern is sceptical of Miller's reading that *Ulster* Unionism lacks 'a genuine feeling of co-nationality with the British people', stating that this portrays a 'cold-blooded alliance between Ulster Protestants and the mainland British' that shows little to no emotional attachment towards the Union (2007: 83). What this view of *Ulster* Unionism does is degrade the importance of the connection with Great Britain. While Unionists do view the Union pragmatically as providing financially and political stability for Northern Ireland, it would be overly simplistic to argue that there is not also an emotional dimension to this. If that were truly the case then surely *Ulster* Unionists would not campaign as hard over issues of culture and identity? If *Ulster* Unionists truly have no emotional ties to the Union, why did

Northern Ireland erupt in violent protests and civil unrest over the decision of Belfast City Council to only fly the Union Flag on designated days? As outlined in Chapter Two, instrumental connects are not enough to hold a union state together. For it to truly thrive, a sense of belonging must also exist in order to bind the nations together. That being said, could Miller's view that *Ulster* Unionists are not British enough to belong really be the case? This theory will be discussed further in the third section of this thesis and will be put to the test through the questioning of *Ulster* Unionist participants in Part Two of this thesis.

While Miller (1978: 2-3) may argue that *Ulster* Unionists are not British enough due to their refusal to give their loyalty to Westminster and hence undermining the representative component which binds the United Kingdom, McLean and McMillan believe it to be the opposite of this: that *Ulster* Unionists are *too British* to truly belong. Although Northern Irish Unionists see themselves and their country as inherently British, a school of thought exists that states that Northern Ireland cannot truly claim the identity of Britishness. As argued by McLean and McMillan (2005: 2), British should not technically apply to Northern Ireland as it is not a part of Great Britain. Indeed, even the understanding of what it means to be a British Unionist holds different meanings depending on what region of the United Kingdom one is in. The Britishness that can be experienced in Northern Ireland may look strange to some political thinkers as it does not fit into the traditional *English* definitions of British identity. As argued by McLean and McMillan (2006: 35), Northern Irish Unionism and its perception of British identity has more in common with Scotland than it does with England as 'Northern Ireland was the true home of primordial Unionism, an ideology which English politicians never understood but sometimes exploited'. The Protestant connection within Ulster Scots is perhaps the biggest influence on the social and cultural similarities between Northern Ireland and Scotland (McLean and McMillan, 2006: 35; Walker, 2010: 248).

McLean and McMillan stated that (2005: 153), 'Primordial Unionism lives on in Ulster. In Britain, it is no more', but just what is Britain? If we look at it in terms of the instrumental and primordial, the argument made by McLean and McMillan becomes clearer. The primordial Unionism that they mention is Britishness as an end in and of itself. This refers to cultural and social Britishness, or the contract and identity tropes which have been explored within this thesis. If one were to look at the 'primordial unionism' that McLean and McMillan observe in Ulster, such as Orange Order Parades and the symbols and emblems that go with this, it could then be argued that this type of Unionism does only exist in Ulster. If primordial Unionism no longer exists in Britain, what then do McLean and McMillan argue holds the United Kingdom together? For them, it is a purely instrumental Unionism that now binds the Union. As long as the Union is the best deal for all of the actors involved it will remain in existence. If it should ever no longer provide benefits for its members, the elective contracts can either be renegotiated or broken. What this means is that the identity of the United Kingdom is no longer stable or sustainable.

Yet this theory of not belonging because Unionists are too British is itself a paradox. How can something not belong by being too much of the thing which it wishes to belong to? An enthusiastic football fan who buys every kit, both home and away, for their team and never misses a single match may appear to border on the obsessive by someone observing this behaviour from the outside. Compared to a fan who is less ostentatious in their support this behaviour may seem over the top, yet it does not make this individual any less, or arguably, any more of a fan than their less enthusiastic counterpart. The same can also be said of *Ulster* Unionists and Britishness. Chapter Four of this thesis outlines a theoretical approach to how Britishness in Northern Ireland can be viewed as a simulacrum of British identity and which helps to explain the assumptions of McLean and McMillan. As the discussion of Miller and McLean and McMillan has shown, theories surrounding *Ulster* Unionism and allegiance are paradoxical, being perceived at one and the same time as not British enough and as too British.

The counter argument to this debate is that Northern Ireland is not an exception to the rule of British allegiance, but that it is representative of it. Bew believes that the relationship between Ireland and Great Britain cannot be simplified into terms of colonialism (2009: xvi). This view of the relationship is both narrow and damaging. It fails to take into account the role which Ireland has played throughout British history since the 1800 Act of Union. In terms of allegiance, this Act integrated Ireland into the United Kingdom through both a constitutional arrangement and political representation at Parliament (Bew, 2009: 3-4; 99). However, as has been observed previously, a union cannot be sustained through allegiance alone. There must also be a shared sense of affinity to ensure the strength of the purely political connections (Bew 2009: 17). As observed by Crawford, 'Ireland was not a colony but a central cog in the United Kingdom' (Bew, 2009: 116). In a modern context it undermines *Ulster* Unionism to state that they do not truly belong to the United Kingdom, given the level of their allegiance to this Union. Historically Ulster Unionism began its life as Irish Unionism, an attempt to keep the whole island of Ireland within the United Kingdom. However, this did not work and as a consequence only six counties of Ireland remained within the Union. Often it is too easy and convenient to leave Northern Ireland (or Ireland in a historical context) out of debates surrounding the nature of Britishness. For example, Gordon Brown's attempt to try to create a version of Britishness and Unionism during his 2006 Fabian Society speech failed to include *Ulster* Unionists and the significant role which they play within British national identity (Bew, 2009: xii).

Bew's argument is similar to Colin Kidd's concept of 'representative distinctiveness' within Scottish Unionism. The relationship between *Ulster* Unionism and the Union can be viewed as a strictly instrumental arrangement, with Northern Ireland maintaining its allegiance to the United Kingdom in order to keep enjoying the economic benefits which they received from this constitutional connection (McCall,

1998: 392). However, this view is far too simplistic, indeed nationalistically partisan, and fails to take into account the identity which also serves to connect *Ulster* Unionists to their neighbours across the Irish Sea. As mentioned within the discussion of McLean and McMillan, there are similarities between Scotland and Northern Ireland. Kidd (2002: 1175), draws distinctions between the ways in which the Covenanting traditions in both Northern Ireland and Scotland have influenced politics by highlighting that both have a very conditional concept of British identity that can results in distain towards Parliament at Westminster and in particular to the conventions of *English* social order. This can be observed in the case of *Ulster* Unionists by how they have historically been sceptical of Westminster governments and their intervention within Northern Ireland during the timeframe of the Troubles. During this time, particularly around the Sunningdale Agreement of 1973, *Ulster* Unionists feared that there was a lack of commitment from Westminster towards ensuring that Northern Ireland remained within the Union. However, the Unionist commitment notwithstanding is that Northern Ireland should remain in the Union, although Westminster has often viewed it somewhat of a problem child.

British identity, in both Scotland and Northern Ireland, is often rewritten by Nationalists in order to dissolve the Union by appealing to regional identities in terms of a critique of British imperialism (Kidd, 2002: 1153). What is interesting about Scottish Unionism is just how *nationalist (*but not separatist) it is in nature. As observed by Ichijo (2012: 24), Scottish Unionists see Scotland as its own nation, but that it still has a commitment to the Union and that this has been strengthened through devolution, or 'Home Rule all round' as it has been described by Kendle (1968: 332). For Kidd Unionism and Nationalism in Scotland are not mutually exclusive concepts. According to Kidd, 'Unionism was not the opposite of Scottish nationalism, but a way of allowing Scotland to be Scotland within a British framework of institutions' (2012: 6). *Ulster* Unionism can also be expressed as a variation of Nationalism – indeed some has understood Unionism as a form of *Ulster nationalism*. As with Scottish Unionism, *Ulster* Unionism allows Northern Ireland to retain a distinctive identity, yet also remain as a part of the United

Kingdom. Devolution has further helped to reinforce the ideal of representative distinctiveness. Each nation within the United Kingdom is unique and as such needs its own political institutions, yet they are still connected by political representation at nation level at Westminster. This allows regional differences to flourish, whilst still maintaining a sense of affinity and solidarity to the Union and British identity. According to Farrington and Walker, to compare Northern Ireland and Scotland through British identity shows that there is more to Unionism than either instrumental or ethnic self-interest and that politically Unionism is 'an ideological project committed to the Union' (2009: 136). To say that Northern Ireland does not belong in the United Kingdom because it is different from the other regions is a moot point. If this were the case, then the United Kingdom should cease to exist as each nation in it is different, yet connected by the ties which bind the union state together. This is what is meant by representative distinctiveness. This distinctiveness is traditionally held to be good for the United Kingdom. Diversity within unity have played a huge role within the United Kingdom (see Chapter Two). *Ulster* Unionists were not happy to be left out of Brown's speech on Britishness (Walker, 2010: 248). However, it must be noted when discussing the ties which bind the Union that historians such as Colley argue that this approach is weak due to the fact that each of the four regions has been connected to the Union in different ways and with differing success (1992: 314). Wales, Scotland and Ireland were all joined to England at different points in history and through different Acts of Unions.

According to Finlay, devolution has dissolved the Union of 1707 by legitimizing Scottish Nationalism (2001: 385). What he argues is that the United Kingdom is now bound by a different Union to the old Acts of Unions, one that simultaneously binds the nations of the United Kingdom together, but also allows them to develop their own sense of nationhood and identity, hence allowing representative distinctiveness to create unity through diversity within the Union.

Unionism has always been politically quick to act when the Union is threatened (McCall, 1998: 396). Yet *Ulster* Unionists were oddly quiet during the weeks leading up to the Scottish independence referendum. This was possibly a smart move on behalf of *Ulster* Unionists as this decision was for Scotland alone to make. Whilst Alex Salmond wanted to break the Union through Scottish independence, he still held the idea that a newly independent Scotland would continue to have a connection to the United Kingdom through the continuation of the Pound Sterling as the currency of Scotland and the retention of the House of Windsor as the royal family. While maintaining a social union whilst breaking the constitutional union may sound good in theory, a social union needs more that currency and a common head of state to secure it (Kidd, 2012: 10).

Richard Rose divided Ulster Unionism into two distinctive strands: that of allegiant Unionism and Ultra Unionism (Rose, 1971: 33). Within these categories, allegiant Unionism refers to members of the Unionist community in Northern Ireland who are fully loyal to the Union without any conditionality (Rose, 1971: 33). In this sense, allegiant Unionists view the Union between Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom as a good in and of itself. This is not only due to the financial and political benefits that Northern Ireland gains through being a member of the United Kingdom which far outweigh any negatives which might occur; but also those who identify as allegiant Unionists, the continuation of traditions and institutions which bind the United Kingdom together are to the benefit of Northern Ireland in particular and of the United Kingdom as a whole. Ultra Unionism is the other side of this argument. While allegiant Unionists fully support the Union, the loyalty which is given by the Ultra Unionist community is more conditional in nature. Unlike allegiant Unionism, Ultra Unionism is less dependent upon the bonds of tradition which tie the United Kingdom together (Rose, 1971: 210). Instead, the Ultra position is predominantly concerned with maintaining the status quo within Northern Ireland, even at the possible expense of the Union. This conditional loyalty is mainly connected to the Protestant British monarchy and the continuation and promotion of this traditional institution. If perchance the British

monarchy was ever to pass to a catholic successor, then this loyalty would be withdrawn.

Rose (1976: 9) has explained the problem in Northern Ireland succinctly as 'Northern Ireland is neither a nation nor a state. In law, it is a subordinate part of the United Kingdom'. He then appended that, 'Northern Ireland is an insubordinate part of the United Kingdom – governed without consensus when it is governed at all. This is the Northern Ireland problem' (Rose, 1976: 9). As outlined by Arthur and Jeffery (1988: 1), there is little public knowledge in Great Britain about the political situation of Northern Ireland although it was, and continues to be, a core problem within British politics. Although Northern Ireland presented the British government with countless political problems, the fact remained that it is still an integral component of the United Kingdom. Rose (1976: 2-3) argued that a United Kingdom without Northern Ireland would not be a United Kingdom. Not only is Northern Ireland vital to the definition of 'United Kingdom' in terms of territory, it is also a core component of it. Northern Irish politicians serve at the national parliament and its economy, whilst not massive, contributes in part to the wider economy of the United Kingdom. British identity within Northern Ireland has always been associated as a form of state-belonging (Muldoon *et al*, 2007: 94). It shows a connection to the United Kingdom and seeks to highlight Ulster's position within the Union. The importance of this sense of belonging to Northern Ireland along with British statehood cannot be overlooked. Hayward *et al* found in a recent study that four out of five of their participants felt that they had a sense of belonging to Northern Ireland (2014: 4). According to Hayward *et al* (2014: 3). 'Social capital and a "sense of belonging" are understood to foster civic engagement in modern society', a core component to the stability and continuation of a union state.

In 1982 Rose observed that, '*Whether* the United Kingdom exists as a state today is an important question' (1982: 102). In 2017 we are still asking this question. For Rose, the understanding of the views and opinions of Unionists from Northern

Ireland is vital to understanding what is meant by the British state. As observed by Rose (1971: 206):

> 'An Ulster Protestant may describe himself as British, but doing this does not necessarily mean he thinks himself as English, Scottish and Welsh people do when the identify themselves thus. For the residents of Great Britain, this label supplements their primary nationality. For the Ulsterman, it is a substitute for it'.

Rose's approach outlines the importance of British identity both as a social identity, but also as a means of *Ulster* Unionists *electing* to be a part of the United Kingdom. It is this approach of Rose that the thesis most clearly draws inspiration from as British identity within *Ulster* Unionists is not just an *affinity*, it is also an *elected* choice (see Chapter Four, section 4.3). Academic debate on *Ulster* Unionism failed to acknowledge and to appreciate the relationship between distinctive identity and political allegiance and that the two could be compatible (Miller 1978, Nelson 1984 and O'Malley 1983). Tonge *et al* (2014: 110-128), briefly discussed this issue within the book *The Democratic Unionist Party: From Protest to Power*, yet by only designating nineteen pages to this topic and by focusing on one party. In that book, Tonge *et al,* observe that for the Democratic Unionist Party, 'the essence of the relationship with other parts of the UK has been encapsulated by robust claims to British identity and expressed through the values of cultural unionism, celebrating the virtues of Protestantism and the Union within a discrete ethnic identity.' (2014: 112). However, while providing a detailed look at cultural Unionism, this fails to take into account the elective and instrumental components which also tie *Ulster* Unionism to the Union. This concept of allegiance will be returned to in section 3.4 of this chapter, but first this thesis will discuss another paradox: that of *Ulster* Unionist identity.

3.3: The paradox of identity

According to Rose (1971: 17), overt displays of flags, both the Union Flag and the Tricolour, highlight the insecurity of national identity in both ethno-national

communities within Northern Ireland. This reinforces the popular idea in political and historical literature that *Ulster* Unionists are suffering from a crisis of identity (Aughey, 1989: 12). Much of the literature surrounding this crisis of identity focuses on a fear of not belonging. This fear - that Unionists may not actually belong within the United Kingdom - will be further examined within Chapter Four but it is important to mention it here as it does play a role within Unionist identity. For John Hume this fear is 'primarily psychological', reflecting internal Unionist doubt about their place within the Union and at odds with the sentiment of the majority of the people of Britain (cited Aughey, 2015: 107). Unionists do not only belong within the Union, but can also be understood a vital part within it as work by Bew and Rose has shown. Yet questions over the changing nature of allegiance within the United Kingdom fail to note that allegiances can vary but that this does not have to mean that the end of the Union is near (Aughey, 2010c: 336). As observed by Aughey (2010c: 350), the United Kingdom 'involves a sense of distinctive national identities tempered by the habit of allegiance to legitimate (British) government' (see also Crick, 1998: 111). Regional identities may rise resulting in Britishness becoming secondary, but so long as the nations of the United Kingdom retain their allegiance to the Union, this will not affect the continuation of the union state. To re-state, it is perhaps the Unionists who do not have a crisis of identity and that the crisis lies with the failure of the rest of the United Kingdom to either embrace or accept it. As Parekh argued (2000), the intellectual debate on Britishness has generally been disappointing and the 'Ulster lacuna' (I suggest) is a very good example of that disappointing debate (see also Heyck 1998: 192).

There are two key paradoxes of British identity within *Ulster* Unionism that will be addressed in this thesis. First, that *Ulster* Unionists believe that they are British but that they do not behave as though they are British. Second, that *Ulster* Unionists identify with Britishness, but that they are not accepted as such by the British, who consequently view them as Irish. These two paradoxes will be discussed in the following section.

3.3.1: British, yet different

Our first identity paradox is that of *Ulster* Unionists being British, yet not behaving as though they are British. Cultural identity as a social construct - such as Britishness or Ulsterness - is intriguing in that it promotes strong links and connections within certain demographics by establishing a group history based on more than just religion or class (although historically Protestantism has played a huge role within Ulster Unionism (Griffin, 2000)). Smith (2001: 19) has argued that these cultural groupings are 'persistent and binding' as they are often more stable in nature than the oral histories, symbols and traditions that create them. Within *Ulster* Unionism, the sense of group identity gained from Britishness is immeasurable. For Brown, the fact that *Ulster* Unionists are a small minority within the island of Ireland provides an important context to how necessary the Union is in that it provides a sense of belonging and affinity which *Ulster* Unionists cannot get from the Republic of Ireland due to the cultural and social differences (2003: 42). The geographical position of Northern Ireland and the fact that it is separated from Great Britain by the Irish Sea can in part explain the difference in British identity which is expressed within *Ulster* Unionism. As observed by Boal *et al* (1991: 125-126), 'the Ulster Protestant identity is unquestionably British. It is however British, not in an English but in a decidedly Ulster mould'. What this means is that although England is the largest and culturally most significant region of the United Kingdom, Northern Irish Britishness does not conform to that English ideal of identity - it is something unique, yet still British in its overall shape and appearance.

However, this does not mean that Northern Ireland stands alone among the regions of the United Kingdom. As expressed by McLean and McMillan (2006: 35), Northern Irish Unionism and its perception of British identity has more in common with Scotland than it does with England (see Chapter Three, section 3.2). The United Kingdom is in a unique situation in that although the four regions are tied together by one 'overarching identity' of Britishness, the regions have also been

able to adapt and develop their own unique identities and concepts of Britishness (McBride, 1996: 4). Devolution, as suggested by MacGinty, has provided Northern Ireland and the other nations of the United Kingdom with the opportunity to retain allegiance within the United Kingdom, but to promote and maintain a separate regional identity (2004: 95).

Yet Kearney (1991) notes an importance paradox within the Britishness of *Ulster* Unionists. For the majority of people within England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland, their primary identity will be the regional identity of that area. However, for *Ulster* Unionists this changes to stating Britishness first, before a regional identity is considered (Kearney, 1991: 4). This is in part an aspect of the fear of not belonging trope that will be discussed at length within Chapter Four (see section 4.3). The British identity that is to be found in Northern Ireland is not similar to that which may be found in England, but is somewhat more unique to the situation in Ulster. Northern Irish Prime Minister Brookeborough once stated that 'Since I've become an Ulsterman I hate the English rather more' (cited in Van Voris, 1975: 4). This is due in part to the perceived lack of enthusiasm that is given from England towards Northern Ireland. As argued by Patterson and Kaufmann (2007: 7) this insecurity about their belonging within the Union shaped Britishness within *Ulster* Unionism into the distinctive form that it holds today. Another reason for this is that the cultural Britishness expressed in Northern Ireland is alien to that experienced within the rest of the United Kingdom (Gallagher, 2008: 106). Issues such as flags and emblems are used to portray cultural and political identity in Northern Ireland more than in any other region of the United Kingdom. Flags in Northern Ireland are used to distinguish identity and act as a means through which one can publicly show their allegiances and state loyalty (Bryson and McCartney, 1994: 9). However, Bryson and McCartney (1994: 130) have argued that these traditional outlets of culture may be waning as people within Northern Ireland become more economically stable and upwardly mobile and no longer choose the erection of flags as an outlet for their cultural identity. Yet this has not been the case as the

cultural aspect of British identity can be viewed as a close link between Northern Ireland and Great Britain.

According to Todd, the Ulster British strand of Unionism in Northern Ireland is:

> 'secular and liberal in nature, this version of Unionism articulated a sense of connection with the wider environs of the UK and centred upon the rituals and practices of the British state' (cited Coulter, 2013: 419).

Within Northern Ireland, concepts of identity can be briefly summarised into the statement that in Northern Ireland groups clearly defining what they are not, is almost, if not exactly, as important as defining what they are (NicCraith, 2003: 6). As George Santayana argued, persuasively being against something is also a form of self-assertion. It is a means of marking a group as different from another group within society**.** This is most obviously seen in the fact that by stating Northern Ireland to be British, *Ulster* Unionists are also stating that they are not-Irish with the effect of making it more difficult for Irish Nationalists to create a United Ireland (Southern, 2007: 71). In this regard, cultural symbols such as flags and parades may be argued as creating identity in Northern Ireland, and not as a subsequence of identity (Bloch, 1996: 216). Hearty (2014: 5-6) outlined this in the statement, 'Ethno-nationalist identity in a region divided along lines of ethnonationalism can at one level then become reduced to how one differs from the 'other' and their flags, symbols, etc. PUL [Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist] communities have such attachment to the flag as they are, in their belief, British and not Irish'. Within Northern Ireland at least the 'British way of life' is one that is still worth fighting for (McAuley, 2004: 524). One of the problems which has resulted from the Troubles in Northern Ireland is that political commentators developed the argument that *Ulster* Unionists had little or no experience of the 'British way' of behaving, but they still assumed a sense of support for the expression of their 'distinctive' British identity. For Nelson (1984: 96) *Ulster* Unionist allegiance to the Union has merely been a tactical method to ensure the protection of their own identity rather than a demonstration of their abiding common Britishness, a viewpoint that can also be observed within the work of Miller (1978) and McLean and McMillan (2005). Yet

this fails to take into account the significance of social and cultural connections which most feel between Northern Ireland and Great Britain (Rose, 1971).

In his 2007 article *Britishness, "Ulsterness" and Unionist Identity in Northern Ireland*, Neil Southern interviewed Democratic Unionist Party MLAs to ascertain what their perceptions are of British identity. For example, after interviewing Nigel Dodds, Southern (2007: 83) concludes that 'he views his Unionism as ultimately being grounded in a "natural affinity" with Scotland/United Kingdom. He believes this gives rise to an emotional Britishness and hence confirms his bona fide attachment to the United Kingdom'. This viewpoint was further expressed by Sammy Wilson in his statement that:

> 'I think there's diversity within the United Kingdom anyway and I suppose it would be no different from people who would live in Scotland who say that they're British but Scottish. I mean it's different because first of all there are cultural things which are unique to Northern Ireland. There are historical things which are unique to Northern Ireland … There's part of our history which is important to us which maybe people in other parts of the United Kingdom don't consider an awful lot' (cited Southern, 2007: 86).

The article also noted that unlike traditional concepts of Unionism, Dodds 'considers his national identity to depend upon historical and cultural factors rather than being based upon the less emotionally strong sense of constitutionality, with its current legal provisions for British citizenship' (Southern, 2007: 83). This is an insight which will be developed in the thesis and tested by the empirical evidence in Part Two.

In stating that *Ulster* Unionists do not behave as though they are British, it is possible to acknowledge that Northern Ireland may perhaps hold its own unique identity. According to Jackson (1989: 14), the Britishness of *Ulster* Unionists is blended with both Irishness and Ulsterness due to the nature of Northern Ireland. This Ulster identity, is a style of British identity merged with aspects of Irishness which is unique to Northern Ireland. This reworking of British national identity into

a concept most fitting to the Northern Ireland context is not out of keeping with the overall development of Britishness in contemporary society. In relation to the increasing amalgamation of Britishness with the cultural backgrounds of migrants, Parekh (2008: 97) stated:

> 'British identity is increasingly being expressed in a plurality of images, and it is capacious and heterogeneous enough to allow its different communities and regions to find their representation in it. This makes it easier for them to take ownership of it and build common emotional bonds with each other'.

The Northern Ireland version of British identity, therefore, is merely another modernised and constructed strand of Britishness.

3.3.2: Unionists identify with Britishness but they are not accepted by the British who think they are Irish

Although Northern Irish Unionists see themselves and their country as inherently British, a school of thought states that *Ulster* Unionism cannot truly claim the identity of Britishness. The term British itself really only applied to the people of Great Britain, yet *Ulster* Unionists claim the right to use it (McLean and McMillan, 2005: 2). Indeed, even the understanding of what it means to be a British Unionist holds different meanings depending on what region of the United Kingdom one is in. According to Todd, British Unionism in Great Britain is separate from that which is prevalent in Northern Ireland, priding itself on tolerance and other core British values (Todd, 1987: 14; Byrne and O'Malley, 2013: 132). The *real* British cannot empathise with *Ulster* Unionism, perhaps because they themselves have never felt their own identity sufficiently threatened (Aughey, 1991: 2). This could explain why Gordon Brown left Northern Ireland out of his speech on British values at the Commonwealth Club in London in 2007. Weight (2002: 532) summarised this view of *Ulster* Unionism and Britishness in the statement that:

> 'It was the intensity of Northern Irish patriotism as much as its archaic roots which alienated the mainland. Practices such as painting pavement kerbs red, white and blue and the annual Orange parades were once respected as

> British traditions, even promoted to attract tourists. Now they seemed to be an immodest, intolerant and therefore un-British form of patriotism'.

In relation to traditional Unionist rhetoric, 'Northern Ireland is constantly introduced as an integral part of the United Kingdom. In fact it never has been, but whether from guilt or indifference the constitutional myth is rarely challenged' (Crick, 1991: 73-74). Nelson observes that the majority of British people from Great Britain did not realise that Northern Ireland was a part of the United Kingdom during the Troubles (1984: 94). If Great Britain does not view Northern Ireland as part of the United Kingdom and if the British do not see *Ulster* Unionists as belonging with them, how then does this affect Britishness in Northern Ireland? (Gallagher, 1995: 722). McLean and McMillan explain it (2006: 43) by arguing that British governments do not wish to force Northern Ireland to remain within the Union and that the Principle of Consent will be adhered to. One suggestion as to why this may be the case is that devolution in the United Kingdom is seen by many in England to benefit the regions while impacting negatively upon English constituents. Hazell (2006: 1) discussed this in the statement that the English feel that they are missing out on the political representation that members of the three smaller regions experiencing through devolution. It is therefore not unreasonable to suggest that the reason why it would appear that many within the United Kingdom would prefer that Northern Ireland was no longer a member is due to the reason that as a whole Northern Ireland is more trouble than it is worth both politically and economically (O'Malley, 1983: 143). To put it another way: it is not *Ulster* Unionists whose loyalty is conditional, but that of the electorate of Great Britain. It is in this theory that one can observe the reversal of Miller's thesis and this will be further discussed within Chapter Four, section 4.2.

If Northern Ireland is not British in the conventional sense, does this necessarily mean that it is Irish? The speculation that Northern Ireland is becoming increasingly Irish in both its culture and identity has been gaining ground in recent years. As observed by Bradley (2007: 3), the peace process has brought with it a growing support for Irishness. Yet for *Ulster* Unionists there is still an opposition

towards the Irish language. This can be seen in the response of the Democratic Unionist Party to the Irish Language Act (Emerson, 2017a; BBC News, 2017a). This may be due in part to the delicate political situation that has been experienced by Northern Ireland, and the fragmented and often uneasy nature of the social divide between Protestants and Catholics. Jenkins (1975: 13) discerned that the political situation in Northern Ireland is unique within the United Kingdom as:

> 'it is ultimately much more an Irish than a characteristically British situation. This is so despite the fact that it has repercussions for British life and despite the ostentatious loyalty of the Ulster Unionists to the British Crown'.

This is due to the Irish dimension within Northern Ireland and its shared border with the Republic of Ireland. Alternatively, the unique sense of Britishness that is experienced in Northern Ireland may be so far removed from what Britishness means to the rest of the United Kingdom because it has developed as a mechanism to withhold the tide of Irish nationalism and the political campaign for a United Ireland. O'Malley highlights an interesting paradox in this concept as Ulster Unionists have constantly based their arguments around not becoming a part of a United Ireland than they have for remaining a part of the United Kingdom (1983: 139). Whilst there may be truth behind this it is also reminiscent of the negative interpretation of *Ulster* Unionism that doubts their Britishness (see Chapter Four, section 4.2). Either way, it has often been surveyed that 'In nationality terms, Westminster and Dublin were agreed that Ulster was not British' yet this is too simplistic to fully describe the complexities of British identity within Northern Ireland (Miller, 1978: 158).

Evidence to support these paradoxes of *Ulster* Unionism and Britishness will be examined and tested through the interview stage of this thesis (see Part Two). Is there a part of the British identity which *Ulster* Unionists lack, or is British identity an example of unity through diversity? The theoretical concept of elective affinity may hold the answers for the answers for these questions and is explored in depth in Chapter Four.

3.4: Unionist questions

From the examination of academic literature in Chapter Two and Three, five key questions have emerged for further consideration in Part Two of this thesis. These questions will be introduced here in order to provide the context for that later examination. These questions which have emerged from the literature will be tested in Part Two through analysis of data gathered from interviews with Unionist MLAs to gain an insight into how these paradoxes of identity and belonging are felt by Unionist political elites during a time of constitutional unrest across the United Kingdom.

The first question which will be addressed is: What does it mean to be a 'British citizen' – and do *Ulster* Unionists fit this description? This question refers to the Unionist paradox of belonging as described through the historical approaches of both Miller and Bew. What is core to this question is the Unionist fear of not belonging within the Union (see Chapter Four, section: 4.2). Four decades on from Miller's seminal research, are *Ulster* Unionists still left out in the cold, deemed to be not British enough to belong within the United Kingdom? Or was Bew accurate to refer to *Ulster* Unionism as being in many ways representative of Britishness?

What does it mean to have a 'British identity' – and do *Ulster* Unionists fit within this ideal? Are *Ulster* Unionists too British to truly be accepted as having a British identity, as McLean and McMillan argued in 2005, or are *Ulster* Unionists an ideal case study of what it truly means to be British? (see Chapter Three, section 3.2). Can there even be a definition of Britishness which applies across the United Kingdom? Or are regional identities too distinctive within the United Kingdom to allow a one-size-fits-all approach to national identity?

The next question that has emerged is that of: Is there an 'essential/core' Britishness? Or is identity/allegiance much more complex? Is the concept of allegiance and identity as clear cut as it has been presented within the past? The two have traditionally been thought of as distinctive strands within Unionism, yet in truth they are more accurately described as two halves of a whole. Allegiance on its own may be a fragile basis for sustaining the Union without expressing a cohesive sense of identity. As outlined in Chapter Two, the two must be present together in order to form a bond strong enough to last. This will be addressed in Chapter Four, section 4.3, when the framework of elective affinity is fully introduced to answer the questions surrounding the paradoxes of *Ulster* Unionism and Britishness.

Whether *Ulster* Unionists are suffering from a crisis of identity will be examined by the question: Is it sensible to propose that *Ulster* Unionists are 'confused' about their identity? Chapter Four will outline the theoretical explanations as to why Unionists have traditionally been described as confused about their identity, before looking at some of the underlying issues behind this. Using Richard Rose's 1971 study of identity within Northern Ireland as a baseline and data gathered from Northern Ireland Life and Times Surveys, participants of this thesis will be asked what, if any, changes within *Ulster* Unionist identity have taken place in the past four decades.

Last to be addressed will be the question: Can it still be argued persuasively that *Ulster* Unionist concerns are marginal to the United Kingdom political mainstream? From 1921 to the outbreak of the Troubles Northern Ireland was generally ignored in British politics, yet this is not the case anymore. The recent decision of the United Kingdom as a whole to leave the European Union has brought Northern Ireland to the forefront of the negotiations due to its land border with the Republic of Ireland. The 2017 deal between the Conservative Party and the Democratic

Unionist Party at Westminster has now provided *Ulster* Unionists with a serious platform in the heart of the national government.

Many of these questions have arisen recently during the Democratic Unionist Party/Conservative deal of 2017. This deal raises serious questions about the nature of British politics, nationhood and territory in the twenty-first century. What is perhaps most notable about this deal was the manner in which it was received by the British public. What is interesting when looking at the role which the Democratic Unionist Party plays within British politics is the statement by McAuley and Tonge (2007: 47) that the Democratic Unionist Party may be the 'means by which the political, cultural, and religious forms of Protestant-Britishness can best be articulated and their core political values protected.' The Conservative/Democratic Unionist Party deal suddenly brought those values through the front door of Number Ten Downing Street and brought those political, cultural, and religious forms of Protestant-Britishness to the immediate attention of opinion-makers and public. Almost overnight, the policies and moral positions of the Democratic Unionist Party were cross-examined and deemed to be at the best archaic and at the worst blatant religious extremism. Yet this public outrage was viewed with something akin to humour in Northern Ireland. Policies which have been controversial and subject to much discussion in Northern Ireland were only being addressed now in Great Britain when it seemed that they could begin to affect mainstream British politics. The degree of public outcry, whilst not universal, was such that one could be forgiven for believing that Theresa May had managed to make a political deal with the Devil himself. It must be noted that *Ulster* Unionists working with the Conservative Party at Westminster is nothing new. Northern Irish Unionists have helped to support Westminster governments in the past, mainly up until the 1970s (Caterall, 2017). This relationship weakened after the 1973 Sunningdale Agreement when Unionists disagreed with the Conservative Party 'due to the guaranteed role it gave Dublin in the affairs of the Province' (Newsletter, 2013).

The stance of the Democratic Unionist Party on social issues such as abortion and LGBT rights has been a major area of concern among the political parties at Westminster (Irish Times, 2017; Cramb, 2017). It must be noted that the Conservative Party are not endorsing the policies of the Democratic Unionist Party through this deal as they do not see eye-to-eye on certain social issues such as LGBT rights (BBC, 2017a). For them it is a practical decision in order to ensure that they have a majority within Parliament for key votes because Mrs May's electoral gamble failed to return the expected large majority. Even with this, some within the Conservative Party are still uneasy with this deal (Peck, 2017a). Others, such as the then Liberal Democrat leader Tim Farron and Plaid Cymru leader Leanne Woods have expressed scepticism over the deal, stating that the deal and the £1 billion pound price tag are little more than an attempt at bribery on Theresa May's part in order to try and maintain power at Westminster (BBC News, 2017c; BBC News, 2017d). Yet not everyone shares the same opinions on this deal. Whilst it has been argued by both Arlene Foster and Theresa May that this deal will be beneficial for the United Kingdom, Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn has disputed this claim (BBC News, 2017b; BBC News, 2017d). It is also important to note that although the deal with the Conservatives saw the Democratic Unionist Party take home an impressive £1 billion pounds for Northern Ireland, the money has not bought May the unquestioning support of the Party. On the 13th September 2017, the Democratic Unionist Party voted against the Conservative Party on the issues of NHS pay increases and raises to tuition fees (Mason and McDonald, 2017). Does this raise the old questions of *Ulster* Unionists conditionally loyalty to Westminster? One thing is for sure: the deal with the Democratic Unionist Party will keep the Conservatives on their toes.

The media criticism of the Conservative Party/Democratic Unionist Party deal (see Chapter Five, section 5.3 for more information) has failed to take into account the British values of liberalism, tolerance and support for multi-culturalism (Pasha-

Robinson, 2017; Mann, 2017). The Democratic Unionist Party is not alone within the United Kingdom, or even in this political pact, in not supporting same-sex marriage or abortion. Yet the media backlash would have us believe that the Democratic Unionist Party and Unionism in general are somehow un-British in their views. This is interesting as it does not take into account the difference in views that exist within the Conservative Party or the British population at large. Somehow, Northern Irish Unionism is excluded from the narratives of tolerance and multi-culturalism. What is it about Unionist culture that is so distasteful to the British establishment? To provide an answer to this within the framework of this thesis, the views of Unionism are not tolerated because they are simply not viewed as being British (see section 3.3.2).

Despite this invitation into the arena of the British political elite, *Ulster* Unionism continues to act as though its very existence is threatened. For example, in the 2017 Assembly Election, the Democratic Unionist Party fought the election on the basis that if they were not voted in as the largest party, that Northern Ireland would come under the control of Sinn Fein. This argument failed to recognise the joint status and authority of the First and Deputy First Minister in Northern Ireland. Why then, do Unionists still appear to fear that they do not belong within the Union? Why does Britishness in Northern Ireland still need to go up against an 'other' in order to be electorally successful? These are core questions to understanding the psyche of *Ulster* Unionists. This will be addressed within a theoretical context in Chapter Four, and through the experiences of Unionist politicians in Chapter Five.

British identity of *Ulster* Unionism is complex and often contradictory - I have called it intrinsically paradoxical - and it is the argument of this thesis that its character still requires a more subtle form of understanding. Aspects of any complex identity can be distinctive and particular (*Ulster* Unionism) and other aspects of it representative of a larger whole (Britishness). Doing justice to what is both distinctive and representative is a challenge when addressing any identity. For

example, Gordon Brown's attempt to define 'Britishness' a decade ago (also discussed above) were twofold. On the one hand, that his definition was too generic to properly capture what is distinct about *British* values (2007) and on the other hand, that his definition was actually too distinctive – that these were not British examples but *English* values. If British values are truly the most important aspect of British national identity, who should decide upon what they are: the politicians or the judges (Bellamy and Whitebrook, 1981: 743)? What is interesting about the Democratic Unionist Party/Conservative deal is how the Democratic Unionist Party is viewed as being against the core British value of tolerance (Bush, 2017a). It is one of the themes of this thesis that much of the literature on *Ulster* Unionism has been concerned with what is distinctive about its character rather than what is also - and necessarily - representative of wider British values or experience.

According to Farrington and Walker (2009: 136), 'In this context Unionism is crucial, as it is the rationale for these identities across the constituent nations of the United Kingdom. Considering the importance of Unionism, in political rhetoric at the very least, it is surprising that it has not been widely studied outside of Northern Ireland.' It is therefore vital that this study of Unionism is expanded to include the United Kingdom as a whole. Particularly following the Scottish independence referendum of 2014 and the European referendum of 2017, questions surrounding Unionism and the constitutional union of the United Kingdom need to be addressed. All of these questions will be addressed within Part Two.

3.5: Conclusion

As was once noted by Kumar, the United Kingdom is often taken for granted until discussion is raised about the possibility of it breaking-up (2000: 575). British national identity within Northern Ireland can be viewed as varied and ever adapting and a good example of Kumar's general thesis. For Robbins, issues surrounding the nature of British national identity result from the fact that '"Britishness" is a capacious concept' (cited Crozier, 1990:14). Should one speak of Britishness as a definite thing? Is this even possible as each region within the United Kingdom has a distinctive political aspect and a distinctive regional identity within Britishness (Hechter, 1973: 324-324)? This distinctive unionist form of Britishness cannot be found within the rest of the United Kingdom and has been created locally through the merger of British, Irish and Ulster perspectives of identity.

The mixed elements of Unionist identity and allegiance were well-captured by Boal *et al* (1991: 128): 'the great majority express both a strong sense of Britishness, and an equally great desire to further sharpen that self-designation by incorporating an Ulster gloss: they are also as certain that mainland Britons see them as in some sense Irish' Although the Northern Irish identity is a patch-work quilt of British, Ulster and Irish identities which seems at times alien and incomprehensible to many in Great Britain, it is perhaps not too far from representing British Unionism in its most traditional form. The impact of outside events cannot be underestimated within studies of national identity and devolution has played a massive role in shaping the identity of the United Kingdom (Benner, 1997: 203; Ichijo, 2012: 34). Britishness, in its most basic form, is a belonging with others in the United Kingdom based upon shared history, culture and affinities (Newman, 1996: 126-127). The questions of *Ulster* Unionist belonging which were raised in this chapter will be further examined within a more theoretical framework in Chapter Four. The concept of elective affinity will be used to suggest a way to reconcile the paradoxes of *Ulster* Unionism and British identity, alongside a tripartite theoretical approach to understanding the Unionist fear of not belonging.

Chapter Four

Paradoxes of Unionist Britishness

4.1: Introduction

This chapter re-examines the paradoxes of the previous two chapters within the distinctive theoretical frameworks which can be used to provide contrasting interpretations on the character of these paradoxes of Ulster Britishness. One may begin by noting a key question about the nature of the United Kingdom at the time of the Irish Home Rule question, one which associates nation, identity and state. It was put succinctly by George Boyce: 'was the United Kingdom inhabited by a single nation however much regional or even patriotic differences might distinguish its component parts' or was it 'one whose national distinctions made it essential that they should be given some constitutional recognition?' (1988: 8-9). Those alternatives are important in terms of understanding both the constitutional make-up of the United Kingdom and of the questions which surround the nature of British national identity within this union state.

Since the end of the twentieth century questions have been raised concerning devolution and the impact this has subsequently had upon what it means to be British (Elazar, 1987; Nairn, 1977; Aughey, 2007b; Kidd, 2008; Trench, 2008). The idea of Britishness introduced by New Labour's constitutional changes after 1997 was not new. Devolution represented a switch from the first to the second of the alternatives which Boyce identified to be at the heart of the Irish Home Rule crisis. However, it did not settle the political question which the second alternative raised: was the United Kingdom capable of sustaining its unity if constitutional recognition is given to national distinctions, interesting questions in other words about unity and diversity within the United Kingdom (Wright and Gamble, 2000). It is also important to note that it may be argued that unity *within* diversity was already a core component factor of Britishness *before* devolution. As a union state, the

United Kingdom has always been host to a variety of regional and national identities, yet these have co-existed reasonably harmoniously (Ireland apart) under the overarching umbrella identity of Britishness. Today, across the United Kingdom, questions of national identity are more prominent in British politics. Constitutional uncertainty surrounding recent political events such as the Scottish independence referendum and the decision of the United Kingdom to leave the European Union have brought what Rose and Madgwick (1982) called the territorial dimension of British politics back to the centre of political debate. There are also questions surrounding the nature of ethnic and civic nationalism and how both of these concepts shape identity within the United Kingdom (Langlands, 1999: 54; Kearney, 2000, 16; Parekh, 2006; Heath and Roberts, 2006: 2). As described within Chapter Two, section 2.4, the United Kingdom can be understood by separating it into three distinctive sets of relations: the constitutional, social and economic unions. Together these three unions interact to bind the four nations of the United Kingdom together. These unions outline the interconnectivity of the United Kingdom and how each component nation relates to the whole.

In Chapter Three the thesis narrowed its focus from examining the paradoxes of Britishness to the paradoxes of *Ulster* Unionism. This was done through an examination of the allegiance versus identity trope prevalent in academic research on *Ulster* Unionism and identity. Concerns over *Ulster* Unionism and Britishness stem from the idea that *Ulster* Unionism is currently (and has been for some time) undergoing a crisis of identity (Aughey, 1989: 12). From an allegiance viewpoint, the relationship between *Ulster* Unionism and the British state is often referred to as a result of Unionist insecurities about their constitutional position. In Ireland they are only a small minority, but within the United Kingdom *Ulster* Unionists can find historical, cultural and social connections which provide a sense of belonging and affinity not shared with the rest of Ireland (Rose, 1971; Aughey, 2010a; Southern, 2007; Gallagher, 2008). What the observation of Unionist identity in Chapter Three can be reduced to is this version of the Boyce alternatives: are *Ulster* Unionists British, but do not behave as though they are; or are they British, but not

accepted as such by the rest of the United Kingdom who view them as Irish? The claim that *Ulster* Unionists are not perceived to be British by their neighbours in Great Britain relates to the differences in culture, geography and political situation that can be found within Northern Ireland (Miller, 1978; McLean and McMillan, 2005; Jenkins, 1975; Todd, 1987). The purpose of this chapter is to highlight these questions: What does it mean to be a British citizen and do Unionists fit the description? Is there an ideal British identity? Are the concepts of allegiance and identity more complex and interconnected than previously thought? Is there really a crisis of identity in *Ulster* Unionism or has it simply been misinterpreted?

The remit of this chapter is to attempt a synthesis of the paradoxes of Britishness and *Ulster* Unionism of Chapters Two and Three in an examination of the paradoxes of *Unionist Britishness*. In order to observe and critique how these paradoxes have traditionally been viewed in the academic literature, this chapter will explore some interpretations of Unionism and Britishness, interpretations which tend to highlight the contradictions of identity that exist between the alternatives set out above: are *Ulster* Unionists British, but do not behave as though they are; or are they British, but not accepted as such by the rest of the United Kingdom who view them as Irish? This theoretical approach to understanding the idea of the *Ulster* Unionist fear of belonging will consist of interdisciplinary theories highlighting the role of doubt and insecurity in *Ulster* Unionist identity – in other words, that the Unionist fear of not belonging means that *Ulster* Unionism is not really British and that it is undergoing a 'crisis of identity'. This familiar understanding of *Ulster* Unionism, then, takes a *negative* view of Unionist identity: essentially, that it defines itself against Irishness rather than positively for Britishness (Miller, 1978). What is often ignored is the variety of British identity across the United Kingdom. Scotland and Wales are also different to England and to each other, yet why is it only Northern Ireland that is viewed as being either *too* British, or not British enough, to justify its place within the Union? The chapter takes the idea of 'elective affinity' and uses it to explain *positively* those paradoxical aspects of Unionist Britishness so commonly noted to constitute a *negative* crisis of identity.

4.2: The paradox of belonging

As discussed in section 4.1 of this chapter, the paradoxes of Unionist Britishness can be separated into both critical and sympathetic interpretations. The first of these theoretical underpinnings will examine the fear of not belonging that has traditionally been considered a core aspect of Unionist identity and will discuss the impact which this has had upon readings of Unionist Britishness. To address this matter, the chapter takes three separate theories to provide a unique interdisciplinary approach to the study of identity theory applied to *Ulster* Unionism. The three theories are: Schrödinger's thought experiment (1935), Descartes concept of *cogito, ergo sum* (Ayer, 1967), and Baudrillard's theory of simulation (1994). These theories are here not explored in philosophical depth and the thesis is not trying to make a final statement as to their intellectual truth. In an academic magpie sense, it is appropriating their suggestiveness to provide novel avenues of insightfulness, new angles of vision, into Unionist identity in order to help explain the complex and apparently *contradictory* nature of Unionist identity in Northern Ireland. Separately each avenue of insight or angle of vision provides a perspective on familiar claims of Unionist 'not-belonging'. Triangulated (to use a New Labour term), they also provide a fresh perspective on what otherwise is taken to be the fatal lack of substance in Unionist identity, a lack of substance which can be taken to mean: not British, really Irish, a form of political and cultural 'false consciousness'. The following sections examine each of these perspectives in turn, providing a summary of how they connect the themes of the previous two chapters and how they may be captured by 'elective affinity'.

4.2.1: Schrödinger's Unionists – what's in the box?

While the idea of using a theoretical thought experiment - created to explain the Copenhagen interpretation of quantum mechanics - to explain the paradoxes of *Ulster* Unionist identity may seem farfetched, it is in reality intellectually insightful

and academically suggestive. Schrödinger's 1935 hypothetical experiment was imagined to explain quantum mechanics - this being the theory that objects can have numerous properties, but that observation reduces these properties (Bohr, 1952; Heisenberg, 1959). In it, a cat is placed within a sealed box containing a vial of radioactive material. If this material leaks and is detected within the box, the vial is automatically broken and the radioactive material released, subsequently killing the cat. Yet the core component of this theory is that the box is sealed, meaning that the events within it cannot be observed from the outside. Without the option of observation, the outcome of an event can be understood via a series of probabilities (Gribbin, 1984: 2). Therefore, based upon the Copenhagen interpretation, the cat simultaneously has the properties of being both dead *and* alive until the box is opened and one of the two states is observed (Breinig, 2009: 688; Gribbin, 1984: 2-3).

How does this theory of quantum mechanics relate to understanding the Britishness of Unionism in Northern Ireland? To put it succinctly: it is to do with a state of political and cultural being in which two realities exist at one and the same time. In the traditional application of this theory the core finding is that the cat is both *dead* and *alive* when unobserved. When using this theory to *observe* identity within Unionism the core finding becomes that Unionists are simultaneously *British* and *not British*. To explain this, Schrödinger's experiment changes to suit the context. Instead of a box, Northern Ireland becomes the sealed container of our thought experiment while *Ulster* Unionists take the place of the theoretical cat. The radioactive source changes to become a source of instability, such as the Unionist fear of *not* belonging in the United Kingdom. In other words, *Ulster* Unionists can be viewed as being British and not British, the paradox of allegiance outlined in Chapter Two, section 2.2 (Miller, 1978; McLean and McMillan, 2005; Rose, 1971; Bew, 2009). Here is the fatal and tragic uncertainty principle in Unionist identity. Their own sense of themselves (as British) changes when they are observed by others, especially those with whom they think they naturally belong – their own fellow British citizens (who do not think of them as British). This simultaneous belonging and not-belonging is the core of Unionism's 'crisis of identity' and, for

most nationalists (Aughey, 2015), it is the real cause of the Irish division. Unionists need to release themselves from their sealed illusions of being British, their consequent uncertainty and embrace their Irishness.

The recent event of the political deal between the Democratic Unionist Party (the largest Unionist party in Northern Ireland) and the minority Conservative government following the 2017 General Election provide an illustration of this Schrodinger's act – Unionists being simultaneously *British* and *not British*. The Democratic Unionist Party is a British political party and the majority of its members perceive themselves to be British (Tonge *et al*, 2014). The reality of their deal to prop up the minority Conservative government may work to further cement their Britishness (see Chapter Three, section 3.4). Yet simultaneously they are perceived to be *not* British due to factors such as the contested nature of Northern Ireland as a state and the fact that the Democratic Unionist Party does not support the implementation of certain British policies in Northern Ireland such as the 1967 Abortion Act and the decision to legalise same-sex marriage (Syal, 2017). Of course, this interpretation is ideological in that it pitches an idea of Britishness against a caricature of Unionism. Not everyone in Great Britain favours abortion or same-sex marriage and not every Unionist opposes them. Implicit in the identification of the fatal incoherence of Schrödinger's Unionism is identity as a complete subscription package of values. But this is an error. To be British does not mean to be the same as everyone else. To be Irish does not mean to be the same as everyone else. How the apparent illogic of Schrödinger's Unionism may be addressed is dealt with below in section 4.3.

4.2.2: Descartes: identity and the importance of self-awareness

Descartes concept of *cogito, ergo sum,* the statement of self-awareness that exclaims that 'I think, therefore I am', adds an intriguing dynamic to the academic understanding of complex identities (Gombay, 1972: 71; Ayer, 1967: 80; Scruton, 2003: 29). Doubt often appears as a key component of complex identities and of this *Ulster* Unionism is no exception. A philosophical concept, *cogito, ergo sum*

relates to the effect of doubt upon an individual's understanding of self. For Descartes, his doubt was the doubt of self-existence. The very act of doubting one's existence proves *beyond doubt* that one does in fact exist because the ability to doubt through rational thought proves existence (Scruton, 2003: 31; Williams, 1978: 73-74; Descartes, 1969: 26-27). According to Williams (1978: 73-74) and other theorists (Scruton, 2003: 31) the ability to think and its relation to one's self cannot be easily separated within Descartes concept of the Cogito, as:

> '…they both have another property which is closely related to their incorrigibility, and contributes to it: each of them is self-verifying, in the sense that if anyone asserts the proposition, then that assertion must be true.'

How does a concept of acknowledging one's own existence help to provide an understanding of Britishness within Unionism in Northern Ireland? For Pearl (1977: 77), there are only a few real world scenarios in which this concept could actually be used to prove the existence of one's self:

> 'Imagine, in an automobile accident, a man flying out of his car and immediately after landing on the ground, saying, "Do I exist or do I not exist"; and then with a sigh of relief exclaiming, "But of course I exist, I am thinking."'

To adapt this concept to the theoretical understanding of Unionist identity the statement I think, therefore I *am* changes to: I *think* I am British, therefore *I am* British. The existence this relates to is that of the existence of their British identity and not of their physical self. Instead of a man involved in a car crash, a Unionist from Northern Ireland would be in a state of doubt resulting from trauma, but not from a car crash. Instead, the setting would be against a political backdrop of constant flux: the Northern Irish Troubles; the aftermath of the Scottish independence referendum and current calls for a second one; the European referendum and the unknown surrounding the triggering of Article 50; the 2017 snap Assembly Election and the increase in nationalist support; and finally, the renewed possibility of a border poll and of a move closer towards a United Ireland. During these political events, the Unionist may doubt her or his identity because of the fear of not or no longer belonging to the United Kingdom as she or he imagines

it to be. In asking 'Am I British or am I not British?' *Ulster* Unionists are acknowledging the doubt that exists already –are they really British? – but because they think that they are British, then they are in fact *really* British.

Rephrasing this idea in relation to the concerns of this thesis, self-doubt is inferred by others and assumed to be the existential condition of all Unionists. Britishness in Northern Ireland is a contested identity. Most of the Catholic/Nationalist/Republican community do not view Northern Ireland nationally as part of the United Kingdom, but rather as a part of Ireland and as such perceive themselves as Irish. Most members of the Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist community perceive themselves to be British as they are part of the Union. Both are self-aware of their identities. Yet when doubt is added to the equation this conviction of identity can be shaken. This doubt differs from the original *Cogito, ergo sum* argument in that our hypothetical Unionist does not doubt his own existence; rather that it is doubted on their behalf by others which is a different condition altogether. If he or she is told by Irish Nationalists and other citizens in the rest of the United Kingdom that Unionists are not British, this doubt leads to a possible fear of not belonging. Let us take the recent European referendum as an example. The actual referendum itself reinforced the Britishness of *Ulster* Unionists by showing them to be of a similar mind-set of the majority of the United Kingdom by voting for the United Kingdom to leave the European Union. Yet the aftermath may in fact have the opposite effect. The majority of the electorate in Northern Ireland voted to remain in the European Union and the outcome of this is that Northern Ireland's place within a post-Brexit United Kingdom is potentially uncertain. The recent rise in the success of political Nationalism and increased talk of a border poll introduces an element of fear of belonging within the United Kingdom into the identity of Unionists. Violent republicanism or assertive Irish nationalism does not weaken Britishness in Northern Ireland. Unionists – as an existential rule of thumb – do not doubt themselves but they do doubt that both British public opinion and British policy makers see them as part of the United Kingdom. This fear, or doubt, has traditionally been observed through the rhetoric of '*the mainland does not*

want us'. Or, as reworded within Chapter Three of this thesis, '*the people of the mainland do not view us as British*'. The fear of not belonging has always been problematic for *Ulster* Unionists, the fear that their loyalty to the Crown and to British institutions is one sided and not be reciprocated despite the evidence that Westminster supported partition in 1921, committed substantial resources to defeat the IRA in the recent Troubles and has defended the principle of sovereignty (by consent) hitherto.

The argument is that 'one act of immediate perception' can be used to make a profound realisation of one's self, yet within the ever changing context of British politics this may be too simplistic an idea to grasp the complexities of allegiance and identity within a time of political tempests (Grayeff, 1977: 17). This weakness of using the *Cogito* is only one of the problems of this critical reading of *Ulster* Unionism. The core weakness from the perspective of this thesis is of the picture it paints of *Ulster* Unionists as constantly living in 'fear of not belonging' to the United Kingdom. Yet all the evidence suggests that they *do* belong in the United Kingdom even if individuals in Great Britain see them as Irish rather than British because they *elect* to be a part of the United Kingdom. They do not elect to be part of a United Ireland. This is a conscious choice and one that is real and not imagined. And it is underpinned constitutionally, legally and politically – for now, at least. The political representation of *Ulster* Unionists at Westminster, their allegiance to the Crown, the constitutional agreements which created Northern Ireland all clearly prove the existence of *Ulster* Unionists as a part of the United Kingdom and as British citizens. Even in terms of identity, *Ulster* Unionists are not so fragile as to be concerned with being different from their neighbours across the Irish Sea. Nevertheless, one can imagine – especially if one is unsympathetic to Unionism – that one consequence of the 'fearful' mind-set will be to over-compensate for doubt over whether they truly belong in the United Kingdom and this leads into the next proposition.

4.2.3: Baudrillard and the hyperreality of Unionist Britishness

For Jean Baudrillard, understanding the hyperreal is key to understanding how contemporary society has become a simulation of reality. Baudrillard outlines the process through which reality becomes a simulation. He argues that we now live in a society which has replaced reality with a simulation of reality. Cultural symbolic values are redeveloped as simulacra to promote the simulation of identity. Simulacra are the created copies of objects/things that either never had an original or no longer have an original. Simulation is how this process is achieved. The process, according to Baudrillard, can be separated into separate component stages. First, a true copy is produced of an original cultural symbol. However, society does not accept this copy as true, leading to the copy of the original trying to appear more like the original. Finally, this attempt by the copy to become more like the original has the opposite effect, meaning that the copy is now nothing like the original – it has become a simulacra and is now perceived to be more real than the original from which it was initially copied. The effect that this has on society is that it can no longer discern the real from its simulacra, hence the expression *hyperreality* (Poster, 2001: 6).

To connect this theory to the study of identity is to consider the possibility that a collective identity can become hyperreal. Britishness in Northern Ireland has undergone this process of simulation and as a result is now a hyperreal version of the British identity that can be observed in other regions of the United Kingdom. Baudrillard's process of simulation can be easily be adapted to show how Unionist identity can be affected by it. First, the Britishness that can be found in Northern Ireland is a mere copy of the Britishness of the United Kingdom. This copy of Britishness is not viewed as being truly British by the 'real' British, leading to Britishness in Northern Ireland attempting to *become* British through the use of cultural displays – hence a high level of dependence placed on symbols of identity as a public show of its *true* Britishness. As a result, British identity within Northern Ireland becomes a simulacrum of Britishness – it is hyperreal. An example of this is the 2012 flag protests and the way in which the removal of the union flag from

Belfast City Hall except on designated days was viewed by many within the Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist community as an attack on Britishness in Northern Ireland, even though this policy brings it more in line with the flag policy in Great Britain (McDonald, 2013).

The polarising nature of the Northern Irish troubles and the perceived threat which the Catholic/Nationalist/Republican community appeared to pose to Unionist culture and identity led to the process of simulation in order to protect Britishness in Northern Ireland. Baudrillard observed that, 'As long as it was historically threatened by the real, power risked deterrence and simulation, disintegrating every contradiction by means of the production of equivalent signs. When it is threatened today by simulation … power risks the real, risks crisis, it gambles on remanufacturing artificial, social, economic, political stakes' (in Poster, 2001: 183). In order to protect and maintain Unionist Britishness, it must become somehow *more* authentic than the original. An example of this process of simulation in action can be provided by examining the 2011 flag protests. During this period, members of the Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist community in Northern Ireland protested at the decision of Belfast City Council to only fly the Union flag on designated days. The irony of this situation is that the flying of the flag on designated days only was seen as a threat to their Britishness, while this is in fact the policy that is in place across Great Britain. Therefore, Britishness in Northern Ireland is seen as being more British – and to require more symbolic Britishness - than anywhere else in the United Kingdom. Yet, at the same time Britishness in Northern Ireland is also viewed as being less British than that which can be found on the mainland as they do not adhere to certain policies, such as those regarding the flag (see 4.2). During an interview with Philippe Petit, Baudrillard was asked 'When small nations fight for their existence, how is that a dispossession?', to which he provided the answer:

> 'They are in the ebbing of identity. They are no longer in a battle for an ascending identity, for a sovereignty. They are fighting with their backs to the wall and for a cause which is not glorious, because identity is a weak value, a neutral value. They are simply fighting to prove that they exist, or

> sometimes even, like the Armenians, to prove they no longer exist, that they have been massacred' (in Poster, 2001: 286).

Whilst this answer was broadly speaking of nationalism in general, it can be seen how his theory can be used to provide an understanding of Unionism in Northern Ireland.

Each of these three critical propositions – which challenge the very substance of Unionist identity - can be merged in order to provide an overall observation of identity within *Ulster* Unionism. Schrödinger's experiment suggests the importance of outside forces on identity. These outside forces of attention and observation cause doubt which is experienced through Descartes cogito principle, leading the individual to believe that their identity is doubted. The fact that the identity is doubted connects to Baudrillard. By doubting their existence, Unionists create a hyperreal version of Britishness to remove any possibility of doubt. The question for this thesis is simple. It has tried to show how (especially) nationalist critique of Unionism fosters the idea that it 'lacks' a real identity because its real identity should be Irish. The question is: have the aspects of doubt and not belonging within *Ulster* Unionism (some of which are not *just* fantasies but historically and existentially grounded) resulted in an identity that is both fragile and heavily reliant upon the whims of outside forces, such as the Westminster Government? The answer which the next section tries to show is: no. The critical reading fails to take into account the fact that each region of the United Kingdom is unique and has its own regional identities. It also fails to take into account the principle of consent in Northern Ireland. The next section will look at the paradoxes of Unionist Britishness from a more sympathetic interpretation which will examine how diversity within the Union is actually a positive force. Through an in-depth examination of *elective affinity*, this thesis will shed new light on the paradoxes mentioned within Chapter Two and Chapter Three. Rather than containing only fatal contradictions it is argued, Unionist Britishness may shed light on the nature of British identity elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

4.3: The paradox of elective affinity

All of the themes raised in this chapter as well as the two previous chapters will be tested in Part Two of the thesis. The interviews with Unionist designated politicians will be reflected upon to understand if any evidence for these paradoxes is obvious in the data collected and if Unionist participants themselves believe there is something unique in *Ulster* Unionism which distinguishes and differentiates it from the rest of the United Kingdom. What these findings will show is whether this crisis of identity within *Ulster* Unionism does in fact exist, to what depth and seriousness or if it is simply a misinterpretation by others of the paradoxes of *Ulster* Unionist identity.

The thesis proposes that 'elective affinity' can be deployed as a way to make sense of the complexity and apparent contradictions of *Ulster* Unionism. The term can be traced to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe in his 1809 novel *Elective Affinities*. The political sociology of elective affinity was first developed by Max Weber and can provide an explanation of the relationship between Northern Ireland and Great Britain both in terms of identity and political engagement (Howe, 1978: 366). For Weber, elective affinity was best utilised when it was 'connecting interests and ideas', particularly through a sociological lens of understanding (McKinnon, 2010: 109). As argued by Aughey (2015) 'It takes the form of shared institutions, formal and informal arrangements, similar policy objectives and common commitments, all of which involve a sense of "election"'. Elective affinity can be separated into two components, instrumental and non-instrumental. Within the context of the thesis, instrumentality refers to the decision of Unionists in Northern Ireland to *elect* to remain part of the United Kingdom for financial and political stability, while non-instrumental affinity describes cultural connections, such as historical ties and loyalty to the Crown. As with the negative interpretation of Unionist Britishness developed from the theories of Schrödinger, Descartes and Baudrillard, elective affinity also provides understanding to observed behaviour (Runciman, 2005: 183). As observed by Jost *et al* (2009: 308):

> 'Goethe's (1809/1966) Enlightenment-era novel, *Elective Affinities*, invites the reader to consider parallels between the law-governed manner in which chemical elements combine and separate and the forces of attraction and repulsion in human social relationships.'

What this concept does is help explain the way in which relationships exist and interact. It accurately explains the connection between ideas and interests within relationships (Jost *et al*, 2009: 308).

According to Jost *et al* (2009: 320) 'elective affinity exists between psychological needs to minimize threat—including threat arising from death anxiety—and conservative ideology.' Boundaries create collective identities and this is a similar idea to that of in groups and out groups in society (Eisenstadt and Giesen, 1995: 74). Within terms of nationhood, this refers to Smith's concept of the nation as a defined territory. This matter is complicated within Northern Ireland due to the ethno-national background that is only experienced within Northern Ireland and no other region of the United Kingdom. Primordialism leads to collective identity, something that has been discussed in this thesis in Chapters Two and Three (Eisenstadt and Giesen, 1995: 77). As observed in Chapter Three, section 3.2, Richard Rose proposed that British identity in Northern Ireland is a means of electing to remain a part of the United Kingdom by publicly expressing Unionist connection to the United Kingdom (1971: 206). It is both a means of minimising threat from those who doubt their Britishness and a way of proving their place within the Union. Without a written constitution, the United Kingdom has allowed a more fluid and organic approach to national identity and to national belonging. This, it can be argued, works well as it allows Britishness to adapt to political events without major upset to legal or constitutional frameworks. In 2008 Lord Goldsmith was commissioned to write a report of citizenship within the United Kingdom and what it means to be a British citizen. Yet this has somewhat muddied the waters for some, with Howe arguing that this report actually restricts definitions of what it means to be a British citizen, rather than clarifying it (2008).

Elective affinity complements the dual nature of typologies of Unionism. As with the above typologies, elective affinity portrays Unionists as being both primordial and instrumental, to use the categories of McLean and McMillan (2005) for example. Elective affinity in this regard 'proposes that different nationalities elect to stay in constitutional relation with one another and that this relationship constitutes an affinity giving meaning to the term British' (Aughey, 2013: 226; Rose, 1971: 206; Bew, 2009: 17). What this reveals about the British question is the nature by which regions, and in this specific case Unionists in Northern Ireland, *choose* to reinforce their connection to the Union but which they also assume – as far as their identity is concerned – not to be 'invented' or 'forged' to use respectively Hobsbawm and Ranger's and Colley's terms, but to be 'natural' (who/what we are). The elective aspect of Britishness refers to collectivities and individuals choosing to be, or to remain, as a part of the United Kingdom through elections and referendums. Affinity, on the other hand, relates to the shared ties and experiences which both enable and strengthen the elective act. Elective affinity in its most basic form implies that it is not enough for people only to elect to be a part of the United Kingdom: they must also feel that they belong to the United Kingdom. According to Bew, there must be a shared affinity for democratic politics to work (2009: 17). One cannot exist without the other. A 2016(b) article by political commentator Newton Emerson in The Irish Times perhaps provides the best explanation of elective affinity and *Ulster* Unionism without discussing it in those terms. While there is a clear affinity between *Ulster* Unionists and the rest of the United Kingdom, it may be the case that this affinity is not reciprocated (Aughey, 2017). As with the critical interpretation of Unionist Britishness discussed above, this lack of reciprocation leads to a fear of not belonging. As observed by Aughey (2017), any definition of Britishness should include *Ulster* Unionists and if it does not it should be redefined to include it. This is important as without Northern Ireland, there technically would not be a United Kingdom (Bew, 2009: xii; Rose, 1976; 2-3).

Elective affinity as a concept is not based upon personalities, but relationships (Jost, 2009: 137). This is particularly the case with Unionist Britishness. In this case it refers to the intricate ties which connect Northern Ireland to the rest of the United Kingdom. These ties take the shape of the constitutional, social and economic unions discussed in Chapter Two. The contract that forms the United Kingdom is nothing without the sense of solidarity to promote it. This is equally true of the concepts of allegiance and identity, and of instrumental and non-instrumental. There is always an elective component that is connected to feelings of affinity with the Union. Elective affinity challenges the assumptions and categories of traditional typologies, especially those predicated on a generic crisis of identity and especially those nationalist arguments predicated on the notion of false consciousness (Ruarai, 2012). These typologies have tended to view Unionist identity as either instrumental or non-instrumental, meaning that it either elects to be a part of the Union or that it feels that it is a part of the Union through a sense of shared belonging. As elective affinity shows us, *Ulster* Unionism and Britishness can only be understood once these two parts are combined. It is also important to note that elective affinity allows the United Kingdom to be viewed under the 'unity in diversity' trope. The regions elect to remain within the United Kingdom and feel an affinity to it, but they also hold and promote their own individual political institutions and identities (Rose, 1982: 118). This is important as often nationalism struggles with how to reconcile regional identities with national identities within the United Kingdom. As Kidd observes, Scottish Unionism is in fact a version of Nationalism –insofar as it asserts an identity other than English while not disavowing the value of sharing with England the common values of being British (Kidd, 2002: 1153; Kidd, 2012: 6; Bew, 2009: xiv). In regards to the Ulster Unionist Party, Arthur Aughey and Cathy Gormley-Hennan (2015: 433) have described this relationship thus: 'its idea was British but that its interest was Ulster.'

If elective affinity is about relationships both chosen and ingrained, it is necessary to look at not just national identity, but also at the political relationships that exist between Northern Ireland and Westminster. For Aughey and Gormley-Heenan, the

relationship between *Ulster* Unionism and Conservatism can be described in two different ways. First, that 'affinity precedes the elective both logically and historically, for example affinity determining the elective constitution of the state'; or secondly that it is simply a political marriage of convenience that has very little mutual affinity underpinning it (2015: 435; 436). What is key to both these readings is not the elective component, but the perceived role that affinity has within each. Is affinity between *Ulster* Unionists and Westminster natural or is it one that merely and conveniently serves a particular political need? This question is vital to this thesis in that it ties into the questions of identity which were raised by a reading of the existing literature on this topic: are *Ulster* Unionists British, but do not act like it; or are they British, but are viewed as Irish by those within Great Britain? Affinity is vital to answering these questions. It is the hypothesis of this thesis that affinities between Northern Ireland and Great Britain are real; that 'there is ''substance'' to Ulster Unionist Britishness'; but that outside forces cannot acknowledge or admit these affinities involved in the 'choice' to remain British because they are distracted by the hyperversion of British which exists within Northern Ireland (Aughey and Gormley-Heenan, 2015: 439). This will be tested within Part Two of the thesis. To say these relationships are sustained by mere convenience and by nothing else, the thesis argues, does not do justice to the subject of *Ulster* Unionism (Aughey and Gormley-Heenan, 2015: 438).

Unionists are now part of a consociational arrangement with membership of both the Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist and Catholic/Nationalist/Republican communities. O'Brien previously observed that this relationship can be described as one of 'getting on with the business of governing' but unfortunately relationships have entered a cold spell with the devolved assembly at Stormont having collapsed on the 16th January 2017 (2010: 598; BBC News, 2017c). As of the time of writing this thesis, the institutions are still not up and running again. These constitutional issues provide Unionism with opportunities as well as difficulties. According to Greer (2015: 51):

> ‘A re-engagement with unionist history highlights the continuity and strong structural roots of old mindsets, but it also points to the potential for Ulster Protestants to move beyond the default settings when facing challenges of a rapidly changing world.’

Nineteen years on from the Good Friday Agreement it is necessary to reconsider assumptions about Northern Ireland Unionism. Perhaps old assumptions are no longer as certain as they once appeared. The past after all is a foreign country that we are prone to reflect upon with nostalgia enhanced by the rose tinted glasses of time (Heynen, 2006: 298). At the time of writing, Unionism is in a strange place: the Democratic Unionist Party is the largest party in the Stormont Assembly; the same party helps sustain in office the Conservative Government of Mrs May; Northern Ireland’s place within the Union could be said to be as secure as it has ever been; and recent opinion polls do not show much public support for the prospect of a United Ireland, with only 3.8% in 2013 in support of it (BBC 2017; Clarke, 2013). However, a LucidTalk opinion poll in 2017 found that ‘overall 62% of NI would like a Border poll within 10 years.’

However, Unionism continues to act as though its very existence is threatened. For example, in the 2017 Assembly Election, the Democratic Unionist Party fought the election on the basis that if they were not voted in as the largest party, then Northern Ireland would come under the control of Sinn Féin. This argument failed to recognise the joint status and authority of the First and Deputy First Minister in Northern Ireland. The concept of elective affinities is an important means of connecting individuals to belief systems, such as religion, but this is also applicable when considering how national identity is created and promoted (Jost, 2009: 133). As a concept, elective affinity is both ‘important and cryptic’ in that it is equally descriptive of our understanding of Unionist Britishness, yet also provides a level of ambiguity about the concept which it seeks to explain (Thomas, 1985: 52; McKinnon, 2010: 110; Sahri, 1996: 2). That would appear to be true to the subject as well as to the political condition in which it finds itself.

4.4: Questions of Unionist Britishness

In Part One of this thesis the many paradoxes of Britishness and *Ulster* Unionism have been raised. The thesis identified five questions of Unionist Britishness in Chapter Three that seek answers to the nature of Unionist Britishness within the United Kingdom during a time of rapid political and constitutional change. In this chapter, two distinctive theoretical frameworks were discussed, one negative and one positive, in order to provide possible answers to these questions. This section will bring together the main findings of Part One and to match the questions as they have emerged to the answers which have been drawn from theory. These questions are: What does it mean to be a British citizen and do *Ulster* Unionists fit this description?; What does it mean to have a 'British identity' and do *Ulster* Unionists fit within this ideal?; Is there an 'essential/core' Britishness? Or is identity/allegiance much more complex?; Is it sensible to propose that *Ulster* Unionists are 'confused' about their identity; and Can it still be argued persuasively that *Ulster* Unionist concerns are marginal to the United Kingdom political mainstream? It is necessary to note that at this stage these findings are only suggestive. Until the questions of Unionist Britishness have been tested in Part Two of the thesis they remain only that. Yet conceptual answers can still provide us with an insight into Unionist Britishness. Let us then assess where we have got to.

As outlined in Chapter Two, there are a number of academic answers to this question. For Miller (1978), *Ulster* Unionists are not British *enough* to deserve this title. Mclean and McMillan (2005) on the other hand argue that *Ulster* Unionists are not British citizens as they are in fact *too* British and that this has led to the creation of an identity that cannot be called British. Nevertheless, simply stated, Northern Ireland *is* a part of the United Kingdom, bound through constitutional, social and economic unions. Since its creation in 1921 Northern Ireland has been one of the four regions that make up the United Kingdom. Even the campaign of the IRA during the recent Troubles could not dissolve the bonds of citizenship that

tied Northern Ireland Unionists to neighbours across the Irish Sea. *Ulster* Unionists are British and are entitled to hold British passports, a clear sign of British citizenship (Good Friday Agreement, 1998). If *Ulster* Unionists were not British citizens they would not be entitled to political representation at Westminster which, as Chapter Two argued, is the core component of national allegiance (Dicey and Rait, 1920; Barker, 1947). To argue otherwise ignores the constitutional, political and cultural affinities which bind Northern Ireland and Great Britain. However, this question becomes more difficult to answer when *identity* rather than citizenship is up for debate.

When asking whether there is an essential/core Britishness, or whether the identity/allegiance trope is much more complex than this would suggest, it is necessary to note that there is no one size fits all approach to understanding British national identity. Whilst academic literature has tended to focus on Unionist Britishness as being either too British, or not British enough to deserve the title, it has failed to do the same for Britishness within Scotland, Wales and England itself. Each region of the United Kingdom has its own unique regional identity that has existed since before the Acts of Union. Devolution has only added to this, creating a union state in which regional variations on Britishness are allowed, and encouraged to flourish politically and constitutionally (Elcock and Keating, 2013: 201). Why then is Britishness in Northern Ireland viewed as something that is problematic whenever it has developed along a similar path to that which has been created across the Union? One argument is not that Unionist identity is the issue, but that the issue is the way in which it has been framed within Great Britain. In section 4.2 of this chapter, the critical interpretations of Unionist identity were examined, highlighting that outside forces create negative readings of Unionist Britishness. If Scotland, Wales and England are allowed to have their own regional identities which comes before Britishness, why then can *Ulster* Unionists not have a regional variation of Britishness that is also accepted? Unionist Britishness is different in some counts to the Britishness that can be found elsewhere in Great Britain. It is a simulacra of the Britishness of Great Britain (see section 4.2). For example, there is

an overtly heavy reliance placed upon the importance of flags, emblems and symbols in Northern Ireland that is somewhat alien to others within the Union (Gallagher, 2008; McLean and McMillan, 2005). Yet this was only developed as a defence mechanism during the Troubles to ensure that Westminster could not doubt the Britishness of Northern Ireland in order to try to prevent it from turning its back on *Ulster* Unionists in their time of need.

In regards to allegiance, it is nearly impossible to doubt the Britishness of *Ulster* Unionists. They hold political representation at Westminster, the centre of British politics. They also give their allegiance to the British Monarchy, albeit with more loyalty than they have traditionally given to Westminster governments (Miller, 1978). Under the Principle of Consent that was developed under the Good Friday Agreement of 1998, only the people of Northern Ireland themselves can withdraw their allegiance to the United Kingdom, and as this has not yet happened, it is therefore not a huge leap to state that Northern Ireland is British, at least for the time being. Much of this comes down to the economic benefits of being part of the United Kingdom. Northern Ireland receives generous financial contributions from Westminster, something which could not be matched within a United Ireland. Devolution also had the consequence of levelling the playing field for the smaller regions of the United Kingdom, allowing regional differences in identity to flourish whilst also maintaining allegiance to the political centre at Westminster. It is in regards to identity that the Britishness of *Ulster* Unionists becomes more complex and paradoxical. As with the take here on Schrödinger's (1935) thought experiment, *Ulster* Unionists can be simultaneously viewed as both British and not British. Yet does this have to mean that *Ulster* Unionists are unsure of their own identity? Elective affinity would suggest not. Rather, it suggests that they are British, but within a distinctive Ulster framework, much as an individual from Scotland can be described as having a British identity within a distinctive Scottish frame.

Are *Ulster* Unionists confused about their identity? As this chapter has noted it is easy to see how this idea of a crisis of identity has influenced academic understanding. However, it is also clear from this interpretation that any crisis of identity does not come from within *Ulster* Unionism but generally from without. These outside forces project doubts upon *Ulster* Unionists by arguing that they are Irish rather than British, in the hope that *Ulster* Unionists will then 'see the light' and accept that they are in fact Irish and that their Britishness is merely an illusion. However, this is not the case. Whilst it is true that Unionism started life as Irish Unionism, this was nothing to do with Irishness as separatism but with trying to keep Ireland as a whole with the United Kingdom. After the creation of the Northern Ireland in 1921 Unionism took on a distinctively Ulster feel due to the constitutional and political situation within which it found itself to exist. The role of flags, emblems and symbols within Northern Ireland does not have to mean that *Ulster* Unionists are experiencing a crisis of identity. Rather, it acts as both a means of marking identity and as a way of publically promoting Britishness. This is important in terms of *Ulster* Unionists ensuring that those in mainland Great Britain know that Northern Ireland is, and will remain, a part of the Union. As elective affinity proposes, both allegiance and identity are necessary to ensure the existence of the United Kingdom. Northern Ireland elects to remain as a part of the United Kingdom by continuing to elect Members of Parliament and through the principle of consent. Yet without a sense of shared affinity to Great Britain to strengthen these ties, the allegiant components would prove brittle and would soon disintegrate. What identity does within the United Kingdom is to connect four different nations together and to ensure that they are all represented within the Union.

Are *Ulster* Unionists truly British? If not, what prevents *Ulster* Unionists from being British? It may be they simply do not act according to British norms and that this leads others to assume that they are something else. It may be that they are British, but that other members of the United Kingdom see them as Irish due to the fact that they are separated by the Irish Sea, or because a large minority of the people of Northern Ireland view themselves as being Irish rather than British. If

Northern Ireland truly is an 'outlier' within British politics it is due in part to geography. Whilst Scotland, Wales and England together form Great Britain and reside on the same island, Northern Ireland is separated by the Irish Sea and is the western most point of the United Kingdom. It is therefore a place apart from the rest of the United Kingdom, small and easy to forget. The politics of Northern Ireland has also set it apart from the rest of the United Kingdom. While Great Britain traditionally concerned class politics and the struggles of the middle and working classes, the Northern Irish political system was built upon deeply divided ethno-national communities.

However, one might argue that Northern Ireland is now more central to the politics of the United Kingdom than ever before. The 2017 deal between the Conservative Party and the Democratic Unionist Party highlights the importance of *Ulster* Unionism in contemporary British politics. Having lost out on a majority at the 2017 General Election, the Conservative Party turned to the Democratic Unionist Party, offering them a financial deal of £1.5 billion in return for their support in votes within the House of Commons (Lister and Connolly, 2017). This deal has raised the profile of the Democratic Unionist Party within British politics from somewhat of a laughing stock to a political 'queen' maker.

Identity politics has also become central to British politics (Miller, 2014). It is not only the politics of class that informs British politics, but also concerns about identity and nationhood. Whilst the Scottish independence referendum did not result in an independent Scotland, the close nature of the vote as well as the decision of the United Kingdom to leave the European Union means that talk of a second Scottish independence referendum is never far away. There are also increasing concerns over English nationalism (English, 2011). Many within England believe that they are getting a bad deal due to the fact that they do not have their own devolved institution and that they have to pay for the regional institutions. Whilst all of these concerns are relatively new in Great Britain, Northern Ireland has

been dealing within questions of political identity since it was first created in 1921. *Ulster* Unionists are familiar with these types of conversations. Questions of belonging in the United Kingdom also help to cement Northern Ireland's place within it. As discussed previously with elective affinity, each region of the United Kingdom elects to stay within the Union through political and financial agreements, yet there is also a shared sense of belonging that is prevalent throughout the United Kingdom.

The constitutional question in Northern Ireland remains secure. Irish nationalism is more content with the Union than it has been in decades, perhaps finally accepting an instrumentalist approach to Northern Ireland's place within the Union. There is no overwhelming desire to hold a border poll to gauge public opinion on Northern Irelands place within the United Kingdom. With the United Kingdom voting as a majority to leave the European Union, this may result in questions being asked in Northern Ireland as to whether it would be better to join with the Republic of Ireland in order to remain a part of the European Union and subsequent free markets. For *Ulster* Unionists the decision of the United Kingdom to leave the European Union is a massive positive and one that the Democratic Unionist Party helped to campaign for. In this regard, the decision of the United Kingdom to vote to leave the European Union has helped once again to ensure that Northern Ireland Unionism is at the forefront of British politics.

4.5: Conclusion

The paradoxes of Unionist Britishness that have been discussed in this chapter acts as a conceptual bridge leading the way between Part One and Part Two of this thesis. Part One examined the paradoxes of Britishness and *Ulster* Unionism and sought to provide answers to enhance our understanding of them, Part Two will test the answers suggested to assess if they do in fact provide an accurate interpretation of Unionist Britishness in the twenty-first century. The questions of

British national identity and of *Ulster* Unionism that have been raised and addressed within Part One will be asked of Unionist designated politicians from Northern Ireland - in short, their views on issues such as identity, recent constitutional events and on the future of the Union through the use of semi-structured one-on-one interviews. The answers provided by the participants are analysed thematically against the questions of Ulster Britishness which have been developed within Part One. This is done to assess if Unionists themselves have the answers to these questions and also to affirm or deny the traditional critical interpretations of Ulster Britishness explored in the previous three chapters. Part Two of this thesis contributes an original contribution to knowledge that derives on the one hand from the examination of first-hand accounts of the state of Britishness within *Ulster* Unionism during a time of rapid constitutional unrest and on the other hand, the changing nature of the role of *Ulster* Unionism within current British politics. The thesis now turns attention to these matters.

Part Two

Investigating Paradox

Chapter Five

Questions of belonging

5.1: Introduction

Throughout Part One of this thesis both Britishness and Unionism have been described through paradoxes, namely those of allegiance and identity, contract and solidarity and instrumentalism and non-instrumentalism. Two theoretical frameworks were discussed to provide answers to the questions of Ulster Britishness. The first was a critical reading of the paradoxes of Ulster Britishness by way of Schrödinger (1935), Descartes (Ayer, 1967) and Baudrillard (1994) to create a tripartite highlighting 'fear of belonging' and 'doubt' which has informed some academic and partisan literature on Unionism (see Chapter Four, section 4.2). This implied either that *Ulster* Unionists are British, but do not act like they are; or second, that *Ulster* Unionists are British, but are not thought of as such by the British who think of them as Irish. The second was a positive reading that used elective affinity as a framework through which the paradoxes of Ulster Britishness could be reconciled. Both will be put to the test in Part Two of this thesis. Data gathered from one-on-one semi-structured interviews with Unionist designated politicians in Northern Ireland will be used to answer the questions posed by the first part of this thesis. This chapter will outline and discuss key findings which respond to one of the key research questions and objectives of the thesis, namely: is Unionism facing a crisis of identity? As stated by Smith (1971:3), 'Plainly, nationalism is important – both as a social and political phenomenon, and as an object of sociological investigation' and by asking Unionist designated political elites to discuss their self-definitions of identity, valuable insights may be gathered into the nature of Britishness in Northern Ireland during a time of constitutional change in the Union - and what this, in turn, means for the future of Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom. Northern Ireland has tended to be considered exceptional or an outlier when discussing British identity (Miller, 1978; McLean and McMillan, 2005) but as Rose (1982) argued a generation ago, Northern Ireland was

(and this thesis argues, it remains) something of a 'test case' (to use Rose's own term) for the United Kingdom as a state. By focusing on Unionist designated politicians, this part of the thesis addresses a very specific understanding of identity in Northern Ireland, namely that of the top-down dispersal of identity in society by those in positions of elected office. The importance of identity for Unionist politicians has been partly addressed in recent years by Tonge *et al*, in their 2014 study of the Democratic Unionist Party (110-132). As insightful as their research was to this project, it does not go into sufficient detail to do justice to the complex issue that is the multi-faceted, and often competing, nature of identity in Unionism.

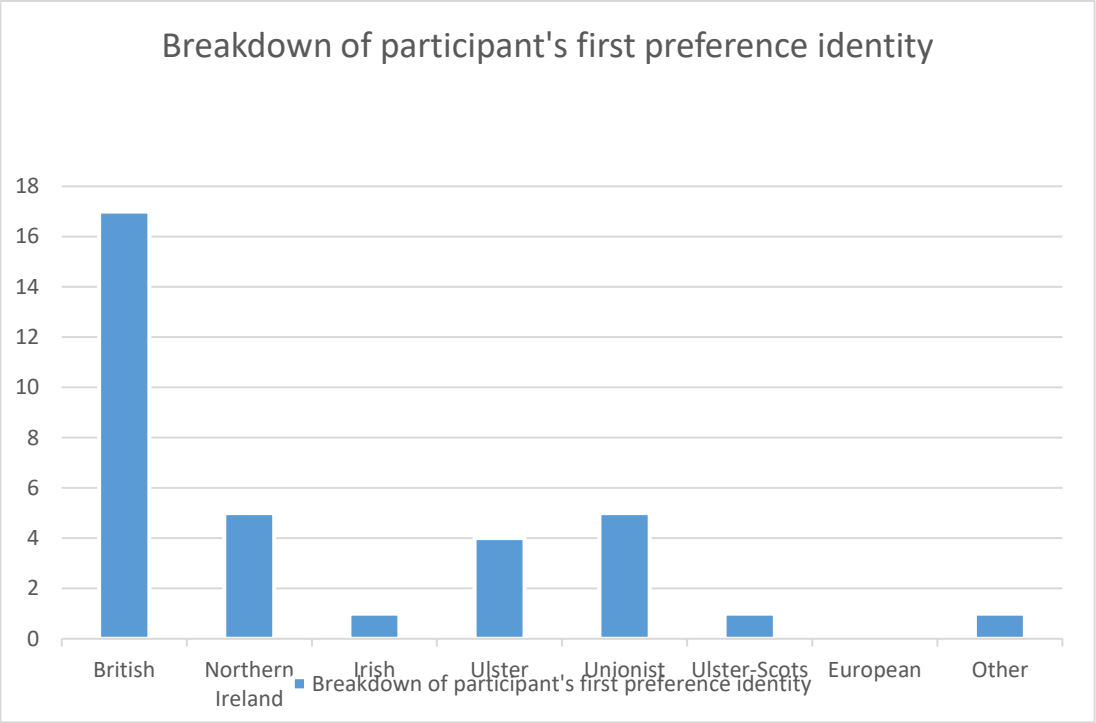
5.2: Identity and Allegiance?

"Your political designation is Unionist, but how would you define your identity?"

The interview question for this discussion was left open to allow the participants the opportunity to fully express their views on their identity in a qualitative and detailed manner. From the start, it was acknowledged that the option of giving each participant a sheet of pre-defined identity options would not have worked for a number of reasons Participants interviewed for this study tended to agree that this was the better method of researching identity in Northern Ireland as it allowed them the freedom to express themselves as they wished albeit within constraints of the question. As agreed by Interviewee 17 (2015), 'There is no point handing anyone boxes in Northern Ireland because we all sit outside every box'. Offering individuals boxes to tick their identity causes them to take a very narrow view of their own identity, making them feel they must choose from a pre-decided menu of options. By allowing participants free rein over their identity choices they were more likely to state a multifaceted approach. Perhaps most immediately obvious point about the findings here is that around half of the Unionist participants believed themselves to be British. For them, this was a given 'fact' and not a 'choice'. Those participants who stated that their primary identity was something other than Britishness did not feel this in anyway diluted or infringed upon their

Britishness. And why shouldn't this be the case? All across the United Kingdom the debate is ongoing surrounding regional identities and their place within the United Kingdom. Within Scotland, England and Wales regional identities coming before Britishness are viewed as the norm, yet in Northern Ireland, and in particular for *Ulster* Unionists, this is not necessarily the case. As outlined within Chapter Four, a negative framing of Ulster Britishness is that they are constantly doubted in their Britishness by others. This is also a disparity – inside/outside perception – which is evident here. The participants were confident in their own identity, yet there is still a suggestion from others that they do not fully belong within the United Kingdom, whether that is because they are too British or that they are not British enough (McLean and McMillan, 2005; Miller, 1978). The qualitative approach to asking this question was illuminating with regard to the answers on identity which had not been previously expected by the researcher. For example, three participants mentioned that their Christian faith played a huge role in how they defined their identity (see Table 5.3). These are interesting responses given the perception in Northern Ireland that Unionism has strong religious links, particularly in regards to social and moral issues. For example, Ian Paisley founded both the Democratic Unionist Party and the Free Presbyterian Church, and for most of recent history linking closely religion and politics within his party. One participant viewed their identity as only Ulster-Scots due in part to a family connection to Scotland, but also due to the history of the Plantation of Ulster and of the strong Scottish influence that is present in Northern Ireland. Identities such as these may not have been considered before the interview stage as having a major influence upon participants, but as these answers have shown the individualistic nature of identity means that an individual can hold different identities without in any way contradicting their allegiance to the United Kingdom.

Fig. 5.1: Breakdown of participant's first preference identity



The breakdown of the data provides an intriguing insight into the different combinations of identity which can exist among Unionist designated political elites. Eleven participants felt that only one identity represented them, with six being British, two Unionist, one Northern Irish, one Ulster-Scots and one Christian (see Table 5.3). Twenty-five participants expressed two or more identities, with the combinations being numerous, particularly when in some cases up to five identities were discussed as being influential to the participant (see Tables 5.3 and 5.5). From a social cohesion standpoint, it is interesting to see how participants described their identity and how strongly they adhere to it. Social cohesion is the result of forces causing the members of a group to remain a part of that group (Festinger *et al*, 1950: 274; Back, 1951: 9). Therefore, the continued membership of an identity group can be perceived as an individual's endorsement of that group. This is a significant point in the research as it is anticipated that by providing the views of Unionist designated political elites on identity groups, this will provide a top-down elite theory approach to how Britishness and other identities are shaping relative to one another within the Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist community.

Table 5.1: Breakdown of participant's identity by preference stated during interviews.

Table outlining the different identities which were expressed by participants during the interview process.

	British	Northern Irish	Irish	Ulster	Unionist	Ulster-Scots	European	Other
1					1st			
2	2nd		3rd	1st				
3		1st						
4	2nd	1st	4th	3rd				
5	1st							
6	1st							
7	3rd		2nd	1st			4th	
8	4th		3rd	2nd	1st			
9	1st		2nd					
10								
11					1st			
12	1st							
13	2nd	1st						
14	2nd	1st						
15	1st				2nd			
16	4th	2nd	3rd	1st			5th	

17	1st			4th	2nd	3rd		
18	1st	4th	2nd			3rd		
19	1st	2nd						
20	2nd		3rd	1st			4th	
21	1st					2nd		
22	1st							
23						1st		
24	1st			2nd		3rd		4th Evan. Prot
25								1st Christian
26	1st							
27	1st	2nd						
28	1st	2nd						
29					1st			2nd Presbyterian
30	1st							
31	1st	2nd		3rd				
32	2nd		3rd		1st			
33	3rd	2nd	1st					
34	2nd	1st						

35	1st	2nd						

The responses given by participants to the question on identity show the variety of identities which can be held simultaneously and without contradiction by members of the Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist community in Northern Ireland. Even within political parties, the differences in how individual participants looked at identity was both complex and often contradictory. Participants had generally a pragmatic sense that Northern Ireland can mean different things to different people, not only across Northern Ireland, but also within Unionism as an ethno-national community. It is interesting to compare and contrast the findings of this thesis with the ground-breaking data gathered by Richard Rose for his 1968 study. Although the two studies have different sample sizes and overall objectives, it is useful to examine both sets of data in order to ascertain if there have been any changes since the late 1960s when the Troubles began. For Rose (1971: 208), 39% of his Protestant participants viewed themselves as British, compared to the 18% of the participants interviewed for the research who viewed themselves as British *only* (see Table 4).

Table 5.2: Number of participants with only one identity

Table 5.2 categorises the participants who expressed only one identity into categories. As can be observed, British was the most common identity expressed in this regard. No participants viewed themselves as only Irish, Ulster or European.

British	6
Northern Irish	1
Unionist	2
Ulster-Scots	1
Other	1

This percentage rises rapidly to 50%, however, when looking at the identity of British *with other identities* (see Table 5.3; Fig.5.2). What may be suggested to explain in 2017 the finding that there is a reduction in the number of 'British only'

responses? One reason, as outlined within the conceptual theory of Unionist identity developed in Chapter Four, is that during the period of the Troubles in Northern Ireland identity became polarised. To adapt to the constant threat and doubt, Britishness in a hyper format, became a dominant identity within Unionism to ensure continued connection to a Union that was under severe risk. This is now no longer the case – or at least, since the end of the IRA campaign. Yet as will be discussed in-depth in Chapters Seven and Eight, the Union is now once again in a time of constitutional flux and unrest, so why are Unionists not returning to an inflated sense of Britishness? Perhaps the most basic answer to this question (at least, at the time when the interviews were conducted) is that Unionists no longer see their own position – and the constitutional position of Northern Ireland - as being either in direct threat or as being a threat to the integrity of the Union. Scotland, English nationalism and the European Union have now become alternative threats to the future of the Union and the interviewees exhibited a mood that, in United Kingdom terms, not only were they not alone but that the constitutional issues for so long thought exclusive to Northern Ireland were no longer so. In short, they felt more connected to mainstream British politics if only because that mainstream had become a little more like Northern Ireland politics (Interviewee 25, 2016). This can be summarised in the statement that 'the reality is we are part of the United Kingdom' (Interviewee 29, 2016). When looking at these results on Britishness in relation to the Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey of 2015 (the most up-to-date statistics available at this time), Unionist politicians tend to look quite representative. Although the questions asked in this survey are different, namely '*Some people think of themselves first as British. Others may think of themselves first as Irish. Which, if any, of the following best describes how you see yourself?',* the answers given for 'More British than Irish' and 'British not Irish' equalled 43% of the overall result, showing that Britishness remains a strong identity within Northern Ireland as a whole.

Table 5.3: Identity by order stated by participants

Table 5.3 further breaks down the results from Table 5.1 by succinctly categorising each identity into the preference it was given by participants. For example, one can observe from this table that four participants viewed themselves as Northern Irish first, yet five felt that Northern Irishness was a secondary identity to them.

	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th
British	17	7	3	2	0
Northern Irish	5	7	0	1	0
Irish	1	3	5	1	0
Ulster	4	2	2	1	0
Unionist	5	2	0	0	0
Ulster-Scots	1	1	3	0	0
European	0	0	0	2	1
Other	1	1	0	1	0

The other comparison that can be made between the research and that of Rose are in regards to the nature of Irish and Ulster identities. In the 1968 study by Rose, 20% of his Protestant participants gave their identity as Irish - compared to only one participant in this study who answered the same. Participants were however willing to state that they had some component of Irishness, with eight saying that Irish was a part of their identity (see Table 5.1; Table 5.3). Again, this change in attitude can be traced back to the nature of the Troubles. Historically, as detailed in Chapter Three, *Ulster* Unionism began life as Irish Unionism during the campaigns to prevent Home Rule. The original intent of Unionists was to maintain the whole Union, including Ireland. This explains why in the past Irish was an acceptable identity if not a political allegiance and Dennis Kennedy has traced the 'widening gulf' between the two identities in the course of the 20th century (1988). Nevertheless, a geographical sense of distinctiveness as well as an Ulster local

patriotism informed Unionist politics and continues to do so. Rose's study captured this well. Nowadays, due to the polarisation of identity that emerged during the Troubles, Irish is seen as being one and the same with Nationalism and there is a sense that to claim to be Irish as a Unionist would be contradictory and even perverse. Similarly, just under a third of Rose's Protestant participants viewed themselves as having an Ulster identity (1971: 208). In this study, four participants claimed Ulster as their only identity while five claimed an Ulster identity as a component of their overall identity (see Table 5.3). This is an interesting comparison on a number of levels. Firstly, Ulster identity may be taken to show the influence that geography and territory has over identity. Secondly, Ulster can be a term synonymous with Protestantism and Unionism, a further way of separating respondents from both the Irish Republic and Irish Nationalists. Thirdly, it can be a way of designating oneself to be 'Northern Irish' – Irish, yes, but politically British and certainly not 'nationalist'. Therefore, to state ones identity as Ulster can acknowledge both an Irish and a British component to one's self that is cultural and geographical as well as political, though not (Irish) nationalist. In short, it is complicated. Whether the identity of Ulster is stated as a defiance against Irishness, or as a means of suggesting a certain degree of Irishness, it is still a core component of Unionism in Northern Ireland. This is tabulated and discussed further below.

Table 5.4: Identity by 1st and 2nd preference as stated by participants

Table 5.4 shows in depth the complexity of the groupings of identity that were expressed by participants. Column one shows first preference identity while the top row shows second preference.

	British	Northern Irish	Irish	Ulster	Unionist	Ulster-Scots	European	Other
British	6	5	2	1	2	1	0	0
Northern Irish	4	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Irish	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ulster	2	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
Unionist	1	0	0	1	2	0	0	1
Ulster-Scots	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
European	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1

There has been some interest recently in the emergence of 'Northern Irish' as an identity of choice (Mac Ginty et al, 2007). However, Northern Irish identity is not a new phenomenon. Of the 32% of Protestant participants interviewed by Rose, one expects that some would have chosen Northern Irish if it was an option. Could the use of Ulster as an identity in the past be taken in the same frame of thought as Northern Irish? Both identities refer (by Unionists) to the six counties of Ulster that are not part of the Republic of Ireland. What is also interesting is that both identities are overwhelmingly taken to be synonymous with Britishness, at least in Northern Ireland. Ulster as an identity, as discussed previously, tends to highlight a clear separation from Irishness. For some this identity may be more inclusive and a way of appealing to individuals from both ethno-national groupings in Northern Ireland. The success of the Northern Irish football team has been instrumental in changing the public perception of what it means to be Northern Irish (Interviewee

13, 2015; Interviewee 14, 2015; Ringland, 2015; O'Neill cited White, 2016). Even with this growth in identifiers, the survey data still shows that Northern Irish is still mostly considered to be a component of Britishness. This would not be a new phenomenon across the Union. Within England, Scotland and Wales, there is no perceived issue with individuals choosing to be defined by a regional identity. For example, an individual in England may be British, English, or both. They may see themselves as British first, or as English first. Either way, this does not dilute or take away from the fact that they are a British citizen and that their allegiance is to the United Kingdom. Since the creation of the United Kingdom, Britishness as Chapter Two argued has evolved and adapted by necessity in order to survive and to modernise. One reason for the flexibility of Britishness is the unwritten nature of the British constitution that allows for this ability of Britishness to adapt when necessary. Each of the three nations of Great Britain (England, Scotland and Wales) already held individually defined identities before the Acts of Union in 1546 (for Wales) and 1707 (for Scotland). As Aughey has noted, 'The growing sense of Britishness did not supplant and obliterate other identities' (2001b: 17). Instead, Britishness became an overarching identity, encompassing all regions.

> 'Britishness involved an idea of the people and of its identity rather different from that of nationalism. It proposed that *the constitutional people is the sovereign people.* It was not Britishness as some peculiar spiritual substance which defined the United Kingdom. Nor was it the acknowledgement of the legitimacy of the constitutional relationship. Rather, the experience of a common loyalty to the constitution had created a new political *persona'* (Aughey 2001b: 27).

Within this one can see how the themes of allegiance and identity within Britishness can work together. As addressed in Chapter Two, these two concepts cannot work separate from each other if the United Kingdom is to survive and thrive. It is at this point that elective affinity can be seen in action. To only have allegiance to the constitutional arrangement of the United Kingdom would create a brittle union in that the ties that connect the nations could be more easily broken. Without that shared sense of identity and belonging within a union state it is fragile. When allegiance and identity are combined it provides a more flexible

approach to the continuation of the union state. For example, devolution was a major constitutional change within the United Kingdom which could have led to the break-up of the United Kingdom as was nearly the case with Scotland. The Union was not broken by devolution and that is because of the feeling of affinity that is shared by all of the regions of the United Kingdom.

5.3: Contract and Solidarity?

Table 5.5: Examples of explanations given by participants

Table 5.5 provides a brief synopsis of the reasoning behind the answers which were given by participants when discussing which identities represents them.

Participant	Identity/identities	Explanation
1	Unionist	Where they grew up The impact of growing up during the Troubles
2	Ulster Irish British	Northern Ireland allows for a unique mix of identities due to its geography
3	Northern Irish	Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom
4	Northern Irish British Ulster Irish	An individual can be multifaceted Geography
5	British	Feel part of the United Kingdom (in regards to culture, sport, and nationality)
6	British	They are a British citizen
7	Ulster Irish British	John Hewitt approach

	European	
8	Unionist Ulster Irish British	Geography, starting local, then looking outward
9	British Irish	Northern Ireland is in a unique position that enables an individual to be both
10		
11	Unionist	Their political views
12	British	Being in the United Kingdom
13	Northern Irish British	Northern Ireland is now established as a country Football: Euro qualifiers
14	Northern Irish British	Geography Football: Euro qualifiers
15	British Unionist	Instrumental reasons (the most benefits)
16	Ulster Northern Irish Irish British European	John Hewitt approach Northern Ireland is unique in regards to identity
17	British Unionist Ulster-Scots Ulster	'fundamentally British'
18	British Irish Ulster-Scots Northern Irish	Geography Sport, football
19	British	Geography

	Northern Irish	Instrumental reasons (the most benefits)
20	Ulster British Irish European	John Hewitt approach Geography
21	British Ulster-Scots	Part of a nation Sport
22	British	'plain and simple'
23	Ulster-Scots	Family connection/history
24	British Ulster Ulster Scots Other (Evangelical Protestant)	Britishness is overarching Ulster is regional Ulster-Scots is cultural
25	Other (Christian)	Their faith defines who they are
26	British	Where they were born They hold a British passport
27	British Northern Irish	'proud to be from Northern Ireland as part of that United Kingdom'
28	British Northern Irish	Between both identities and proud to be both
29	Unionist Other (Presbyterian)	Instrumental reasons (the most benefits)
30	British	Comfortable with this identity
31	British Northern Irish Ulster	They are part of the United Kingdom
32	Unionist British	From the United Kingdom Has lived all around the United Kingdom

	Irish	Part of United Kingdom culture
33	Irish Northern Irish British	Sees these identities co-existing in equal measures
34	Northern Irish British	Northern Irish culture Holds a British passport
35	British Northern Irish	From the United Kingdom

Britishness, as was to be expected, emerged as the dominant identity amongst the thirty-four Unionist designated political elites interviewed for the research. Twenty-seven of the participants interviewed mentioned Britishness when asked to describe their personal identity. Of these twenty-four, six participants defined themselves as British only. For many of these participants, self-defining their identity as British was a more straightforward process than had been for others who expressed multiple or competing identities.

> 'Personally, I identify very comfortably with the terminology British. I can see where other people around this area would consider themselves Northern Irish or what not in that sense as well, but certainly I feel very comfortable, ah, terming myself as British. I have no problem with that at all' (Interviewee 30, 2016).

These deeply held feelings of belonging to Britishness are often seen as characteristics of primordial Unionism, and as observed by Poole (1999: 69), 'The strength and inescapability of the feelings and commitments associated with national identity has tempted some theorists to see them as evidence of deep and primordial attachments'.

The traditional role of Unionism as a defender and a protector of Britishness in Northern Ireland was prevalent throughout the interview process. As Interviewee 21 (2015) described this role in the statement:

> 'Margaret Thatcher said that Northern Ireland, or Ulster, was more British than Finchley. I would like to think it was. It would certainly be my intention to keep it that way.'

Whilst Thatcher never actually said this, this adage is seen as a sense of pride within Unionism, a justification of being. Northern Ireland has often been viewed under this old adage of, *more British than Finchley,* but is this still the case? Or alternatively, has this ever actually been the case? The argument has been that the threat of dissident violence from groups such as the Irish Republican Army during their campaign for the unification of all thirty-six counties of Ireland created a more exaggerated form of Britishness in response to this perceived threat to their identity, constitutional position and very way of life. As argued in Chapter Four, Britishness in Northern Ireland can be observed as a hyperreal version of that which can be perceived in other regions of the United Kingdom (1983). Within the framing of this theory as developed by the thesis (see Chapter Four, section 3.4.5), a distinctively assertive version of Britishness emerged during the Troubles to bind Unionism together against the threat of Irish nationalism and to publically show their connection to the Union and status as a region of the United Kingdom, not the Republic of Ireland. This hyper version of Britishness may be contrasted with the traditionally more banal versions of Britishness common within Great Britain, especially in England - though that too is changing (see Aughey 2007a). According to Billig (1995: 8), 'banal nationalism is not a flag which is being consciously waved with fevered passion; it is the flag hanging unnoticed on the public building', a concept that has proven difficult for many within Northern Ireland to accept. The flag protest of 2011 is an example of the more extreme version of British nationality that can be experienced within Northern Ireland. In 2011 members of the Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist community took to the streets across the country to protest against the decision of Belfast City Council to only fly the Union Flag on designated days, rather than 365 days a year. This is an interesting comparison of Britishness within Northern Ireland and Great Britain, as a similar policy to this has

become the acknowledged practice across most of Great Britain. It is a complex yet fascinating paradox that within the majority of regions within the United Kingdom a policy on the national flag is accepted (and quite possibly not even considered) in England, Scotland and Wales, yet is seen as a threat and a dilution of Britishness in Northern Ireland, leading to the practice of a *more British* Britishness. The history of Northern Ireland has included 'Large numbers of people … prepared to make great personal sacrifices – up to and including life itself – in the struggles needed to achieve or defend the political sovereignty of their nation' (Poole, 1999: 9).

For the six participants who solely defined themselves as British, many kept rigidly to traditional lines of Britishness with little or no room for competing identities, 'Oh British. Plain and simple. I'm not into all this other Northern Irish stuff. No, I'm British' (Interviewee 22). One explanation is that after four decades of ethno-national conflict there is still a resounding feeling within the collective Unionist consciousness that to define as anything else other than British may lead to a slippery slope towards the promotion of a United *Ireland* over a United *Kingdom*. Poole attributes this in terms of identity through his statement, 'Large numbers of people have been prepared to make great personal sacrifices – up to and including life itself – in the struggles needed to achieve or defend the political sovereignty of their nation' (1999: 9). As outlined by Interviewee 12 (2015):

> 'I always define myself as British. Primarily British. I know that there are many Unionists who would say right I come from Northern Ireland and I'm also British. I see myself first of all as British and as living in a part of the UK which is called Northern Ireland. I don't regard myself as Irish, Northern Irish or anything like that.'

This feeling of doubt and mistrust of anything that appears to compromise British can be seen as confirmation of those arguments in Chapter Four about the fear of belonging. On the other hand, that bald statement can be taken to reveal no doubt and no fear of not belonging. The truth is a balance of the two. Much of this reluctance to acknowledge or to internalise identities other than that of Britishness may be down to socialisation and how society in Northern Ireland is still highly

segregated in terms of education and housing. This lack of promotion of other identities can be seen in Interviewee 17's statement that 'I don't actually think of myself as someone from Northern Ireland or Irish by any means' (2015).

For many of the participants who stated Britishness, geography had a huge role to play in their reasoning. Traditionally British characteristics such as loyalty were often discussed by participants when stating their identity was British. For Interviewee 12, being a member of the United Kingdom was more important than the fact that they live in a region of the United Kingdom. Rose discussed the correlation of identity and place in the comment. 'identity is connected to a particular place … by a feeling that you belong to that place' (1990: 89). For William:

> 'Symbols and representations are important in the production of identities. This is how we signal our identities to others and how we know which people we identify with and those who are distinguished as being different. How we speak, the clothes we wear, badges, scarves, uniforms or flags all offer symbols of identity' (1986: 91).

In this context, the larger geographical and constitutional identity of the United Kingdom has more power over individuals than that of Northern Ireland as a region by itself. As Aughey argued 'Identity and loyalty are thus one and the same' (2001b: 24). The reason given by Interviewee 12 is that they feel they owe their loyalty to the United Kingdom (2015). As discussed within Chapter Two and Chapter Three, *Ulster* Unionists do owe their loyalty to the United Kingdom. The question then is not that they do, but to whom or/and what do they give their loyalty? Traditionally this loyalty has been given to the Monarchy for its role in protecting Protestantism across the United Kingdom along with loyalty to Westminster, but this is more accurately described as a loyalty to the British institutions rather than as loyalty to any British government in particular. One of the reasons is that *Ulster* Unionists have felt that British governments have not done enough to secure Northern Ireland's place within the United Kingdom. This brings the conversation back to the fear of not belonging which *Ulster* Unionists

feel not from themselves, but from others within the United Kingdom. This lack of acknowledgment by British governments is a source of insecurity which historically fostered the sort of self-reliant 'banding' about which Miller wrote. The concern – according to elective affinity – concerns both 'choice' and 'identification'. Unless Unionists make clear their own commitment to the Union then Westminster might well choose to disengage. And because there is doubt about Westminster's identification with Unionists as a people and culture, then the concern is compounded. Again, it is not Unionists who doubt their own identity, election and affinity. It is assumed to be others (even if the evidence of this is partial). In short, without these feelings being reciprocated by Westminster Northern Ireland can feel like a very cold place within the United Kingdom. This notion of loyalty is a very traditional and well researched concept within Unionist typologies, stating that loyalty to the British state and its institutions is an influential force within Unionism. The viewpoint expressed by Interviewee 12 supports Rose's Ultra Unionist, and Todd's British typologies of Unionism (Rose, 1971; Todd, 1987).

The pride that Britishness can inspire amongst individuals can also be explained through other theoretical framings. Interviewee 9 alluded to the pride which can be inspired by Britishness and the sense of belonging that comes from being a member of the United Kingdom in the statement, 'I'm very proud of that British institution, whether it's imagined or whatever. You know, I do feel quite privileged to be able to stand under the Union flag' (Interviewee 9, 2015). This statement is interesting from a research point of view as the participant acknowledges that Britishness is *imagined.* As outlined by Benedict Anderson in his book *Imagined Communities,* nationalism is created as a method of bringing together members of the same geographical and political area and binding them together under a common ideal that promotes the protection and continuation of the nation state (see Chapter Four). As stated by Anderson, 'Indeed, nation-ness is the most universally legitimate value in the political life of our time' (2006: 3). This sense of citizenship and belonging is important in forming strong bonds between the regions of the United Kingdom and giving citizens a higher sense of commonality. This clear

use of elective affinity highlights the importance of ensuring that members of a union state feel not only that they belong within a state, but that equally they are seen in return as included. The British passport is one example in which the Britishness of *Ulster* Unionists cannot be brought into doubt. Interviewee 26 (2016), expressed this in their statement:

> 'British [participant pauses], and you know, you start into analysis that and people ask you, "well, are you Northern Irish, are you Irish?", and I'm a British citizen as somebody who lives in Northern Ireland as part of the United Kingdom. I don't try to delve anymore deeper into who I am in that sense because I think I was born in the United Kingdom, I hold a British passport, I am proud to be a person who is a member of the United Kingdom. So, very simply, I would see myself as a British citizen.'

The importance of the passport cannot be underestimated in discussions of identity. According to Woodward, 'To identify with a nation or group like this is to take up a *collective identity.* However, only one UK identity is offered by the passport' (2000: 10). As observed in the remark by Interviewee 26, the British passport has symbolic importance. It is a clear and physical sign of being a member of that imagined community that is the United Kingdom, and that physical proof is something that is held in high esteem due to the ethno-national conflict and threat of de-unification with Great Britain during the Troubles. Mitchell has previously discussed this concept in a Northern Irish context, stating that:

> 'Communities are not entities in their own right, but rather live in the minds of groups of people who identify with them … [But] identities and communities do not just exist in our heads. They are also created by our actions' (2006: 13).

In the aftermath of the European referendum, Democratic Unionist Party politician Ian Paisley MP spoke out publically to say that everyone in Northern Ireland should apply for an Irish passport as this would make it easier for individuals to travel after the United Kingdom left the European Union. What is interesting about this is the fact that for Paisley holding an Irish passport does *not* equate to being Irish. What in this case is the distinction being made? It is the distinction between something which is purely instrumental (Irish passport) and something which is symbolic of deep identity (British passport). The latter is a statement of elective affinity; the

former a mere document of pure convenience for ease of movement when travelling.

For participants such as Interviewee 15 (2015), being British is both about an *affinity* to the United Kingdom and about the *elective* choice they have made to be British:

> 'Well I feel I'm British. I feel I'm a Unionist and British first and foremost because I have a very strong identity with the United Kingdom and the British Commonwealth. [I] Just feel that we're much stronger being part of that bigger grouping of the Union as opposed to being in a smaller United Ireland or all Ireland economy, socially, economically I just feel it's better being part of the union. It's more so that than it is anything around I suppose, being the big flag carrying people, you know? It's more about who you belong to and I just feel that I'm more attached to the Union than I am to a united Ireland.'

Individuals both in Northern Ireland and in Great Britain may not see Northern Ireland as being particularly British, either because they see it as not British enough or as being too British to be truly considered as fitting with the national identity (Miller, 1978; McLean and McMillan, 2005). Instead, *Ulster* Unionists view Northern Ireland as being a part of the United Kingdom as it is constitutionally a part of the Union. Northern Ireland is tied to the United Kingdom through the Act of Union, the Government of Ireland Act and by the fact that Northern Ireland has political representation at Westminster. Northern Ireland also elects to be a part of the United Kingdom through the Principle of Consent that was created through the Good Friday Agreement of 1998. Due to this, neither the British nor the Irish government can remove Northern Ireland from the United Kingdom. This can only be achieved if the people of Northern Ireland themselves wish to leave, supported through a border poll. Therefore *Ulster* Unionists can be secure in the knowledge that only the people of Northern Ireland themselves can decide their fate within the Union.

An interesting point raised in Interviewee 15's statement is the reference to the economic union with the United Kingdom and the importance of instrumental ties to the Union. The United Kingdom has a larger economy than the Republic of Ireland and as a result can provide more financial benefits for Northern Ireland. The National Health Service is another core instrumental benefit of the United Kingdom and one that Sinn Féin President Gerry Adams has recently said he would extend to a United Ireland if that event ever happened. If circumstances were ever to change so that the United Kingdom no longer benefited Northern Ireland, it could be argued that those who truly fit within the narrow black and white categories of Allegiant Unionist and British Unionist would therefore accept a move towards a United Ireland if this was to provide and create more positive outcomes for Northern Ireland. This would make the relationship between Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom purely contractual and instrumental. This view is often overly simplistic and does not necessarily take into account the influence of tradition and culture experienced by members of these groups. While Allegiant Unionist and British Unionists may support the Union for some instrumental reasons, they are still affined to, and influenced by, British culture on a daily basis. It is not then merely a question of '*Where is Northern Ireland's interests best served?'*, but rather a question of *'Where are Northern Ireland's interests best served within our imagined community?'*

If one were to place Unionists into a box in a similar manner to Schrödinger's famous 1935 experiment, what would one see? Are Unionists British? They are part of the United Kingdom, they are governed by British laws, celebrate British culture, history and traditions. Are Unionists *not* British? Or are they Irish but do not accept it? A hypothetical version of this scenario regarding Unionists was detailed in Chapter Four and outlined how one could apply this experiment to Britishness and Unionism on a theoretical level. Northern Ireland is nearing the 100th anniversary of its creation in 1921, the culture celebrated by Unionists is a hyper version of that experienced in Great Britain, and the Stormont Assembly has the power to make its own laws and to not implement most laws from Westminster

if it so chooses – which it was also able to do from 1921-1972. But, why do Unionists in Northern Ireland need to be categorised as one or the other? It is the argument of the thesis that Unionists are simultaneously British and not British, and that one side of this argument cannot be viewed in whole without the other to provide balance. This is where the relationship between Northern Ireland and Great Britain has always experienced a degree of stress. For *Ulster* Unionists, they are a part of the Union because they have an affinity towards the United Kingdom. They are British and therefore they belong within the Union. Constitutional arrangements may enforce this, but it is the feeling of belonging that truly holds *Ulster* Unionists to the United Kingdom. However, on the other side of this argument one could argue that Great Britain does not reciprocate these feelings of affinity and belonging and instead only sees the relationship it has with Northern Ireland as one that is contractual and without solidarity. Not being British, in this scenario, refers to the idea outlined in Chapter Three, section 3.3, that the British truly view Northern Ireland as being Irish and as a result they do not felt as though they share a common identity or affinity. How then can *Ulster* Unionists be viewed as not British? If one were to argue that immigrants could not be British it would cause a public uproar. Why then should it be any different for *Ulster* Unionists? Is it that anti-Unionist bias is the last acceptable form of racism within British politics; that they are an out-group that should not be brought into the centre of British politics? The most obvious example of this was in the political cartoons in response to the Conservative Party deal with the Democratic Unionist Party in 2017. Within these, *Ulster* Unionist culture was portrayed as alien to the British electorate and more often than not left *Ulster* Unionism looking outside British norms.

In Northern Ireland Unionism there is a feeling of being misunderstood by those who live in Great Britain. This was articulated by Interviewee 14 (2015): 'I get the feeling sometimes those over on the mainland think we're something different when in actual fact we're not.' This feeling of being misunderstood in terms of their contribution to Britishness comes partly from the fact that Northern Ireland is geographically removed from the rest of the United Kingdom, with a channel of

water separating it. Yet the role Northern Ireland plays within the United Kingdom cannot be forgotten. Without Northern Ireland, there would be no United Kingdom. The Troubles were a time of deep mistrust between ethno-national communities within Northern Ireland. In times such as this, ethno-national identities take on a much more important meaning to individuals and become inherently more ingrained the more they are threatened. This is one of the reasons why British national identity in Northern Ireland has developed along a tangent to that in Great Britain. Decades of protecting and promoting Britishness has resulted in a hyper-version being created in Northern Ireland, a more *British* Britishness. What this means is there is a core within Britishness that endured despite the context in which it is in. At the heart of *Ulster* Unionism is a core aspect of Britishness, but over the years this has evolved to reflect a distinctive Ulster aspect. This core for *Ulster* Unionists has two dimensions. First, it is connected to choice and affinity. They feel that they belong within the Union and this becomes a core of their Britishness. Second, Unionists share culture, history, language and religion with Great Britain: it shares core aspects of Britishness such as these with the rest of the electorate of the United Kingdom. This is by no means a new occurrence in the United Kingdom, as Britishness and regional identities vary depending on where it is examined within the Union. But Northern Ireland is the only region of the United Kingdom that has had its Britishness challenged violently (in Scotland it was challenged constitutionally). However, as this thesis has shown, the hyper version of Britishness expressed by *Ulster* Unionists has not been accepted by those within Great Britain and is seen as something of an anomaly. Perhaps this says more about the attitudes of those in Great Britain than it does about *Ulster* Unionists. One of the biggest fears of Unionists in Northern Ireland is that the relationship with Great Britain has always felt conditional – not on their side – but on the other side. While Unionists have maintained loyalty to the Union through 'betrayals' such as the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985, often this loyalty has not been seen to have been reciprocated by Great Britain.

Yet difference does not have to impact negatively upon Britishness. As observed by Oakeshott (1983: 67), one can argue that identity is maintained 'not in spite of, but because of, differences and changes'. What this means is that the differences which can be see within Britishness across the United Kingdom actually strengthen and build Britishness as we know it. It is Oakeshott's analogy of the dry stone wall of history, each stone is different in size and shape, but together in relation they create something stronger and larger (1983: 102), considered in this thesis as the relationship of diversity and unity (see Chapter Two). An example of this in action can be observed through media reaction to the 2017 Conservative Party deal with the Democratic Unionist Party. Many media commentators and reports have highlighted the Democratic Unionist Party's stance on same-sex marriage as a means of suggesting that they are different to both Westminster and Britishness (Pasha-Robinson, 2017; Mann, 2017). However, these conversations fail to take into account the fact that there was widespread opposition to the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013 within the Conservative Party, with 128 Conservative Members of Parliament voting against it and only 117 voting in favour (Eaton, 2013). What this shows is that the Conservative Party and the Democratic Unionist Party are not so very different after all – and that it is a myth to propose that there is some absolute template of Britishness from which *Ulster* Unionist deviation is a perversion and alienation.

The differences that can be observed in Ulster do not necessarily make Northern Ireland unique or deviant. As Interviewee 12 argued (2015):

> 'I mean, there are distinct characteristics of this part of the United Kingdom, but that's not any different from Wales, Scotland, the north of England and the south of England, the west of England or the south east of England. It doesn't make me any less British. It doesn't weaken the link. In fact, if anything it just adds to the tapestry of the United Kingdom.'

It is this ability not only to encompass regional identities, but to bind them under the overarching identity of British which is the political fabric of elective affinity. For Interviewee 5, this is a positive of British identity.

> 'Ah, I think in particular also one of the advantages of Britishness, I suppose not unique in a British sense, is also where you can have that broader national identity while having a certain level of local identity, so that there is a great sense of coming from Northern Ireland and being involved with Northern Ireland. Also, I think it's something that's very compatible with Britishness' (Interviewee 5, 2015).

Habermas also theorised upon the distinctions between political sovereignty and national identity. As Donald summarises:

> 'Almost as if recognizing that the notion of constitutional patriotism is incoherent, Habermas insists in principle on the need to distinguish between *demos,* the political sovereignty of the people, and *ethos,* filiation to an imagined cultural community. The conundrum is whether *civic* identity, the membership of this or that state, can ever be extricated from *national* identity, self-recognition as a member of a *nation* state.' (1996: 173)

Britishness as a concept is constantly adapting and changing, evolving to meet the current needs of both the political institutions and civic society. Interviewee 24 (2015) acknowledges the fluidity of Britishness: 'I suppose Britishness today isn't quite the same as Britishness was 50 or 100 years ago. The world has changed.' For other participants the changing nature of identity came from their own internal and personal decision making processes, rather than from society. According to Interviewee 31 (2016):

> 'That's a good question and I think it is probably a changing, ah, situation. Umm, I would regard myself as a British citizen. I am proud to be part of the United Kingdom. When I travel abroad I carry my British passport and it's very clear, it says the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. So, I'm clear, I'm a British citizen. But, I am, I am also Northern Irish. I am proud to be from Northern Ireland. I am an Ulsterman.'

Perhaps the best way of describing the changing nature of Britishness and identity in the United Kingdom is in the observation of Interviewee 16 (2015):

> '… your identity will shift and Northern Irish identity is important to me because it recognises that pluralism and diversity of the United Kingdom, and that you can be, you know, a Geordie. You can be a Liverpudlian. You can be Cornish. You can be West Country, Scottish, Highland, Islander, you

> know, Welsh and Northern Irish, and that fits seamlessly into that pluralism and diversity of the United Kingdom…'

As Powell argued (2002: 89), 'different varieties of Englishness, Irishness, Scottishness and Welshness co-existed or contended with other, more localized, loyalties, or with the facets of a more comprehensive "British" identity to which their relationship had to be worked out both in practical and emotion terms' and why can this not continue to be the case across the United Kingdom in the face of growing nationalism? According to Interviewee 17 (2015), the ability of individuals from Northern Ireland to claim more than one identity, whilst still retaining their Britishness, 'is a bit more convoluted because of the history of the place.' Therefore, Britishness is not perceived as a threat to regional identity, or vice versa, as traditionally Britishness has adapted as an overarching identity allowing regional identities the space to flourish. In Northern Ireland, however, as Interviewee 14 noted (2015):

> 'Well, I think probably it's one of the major problems … "what is your identity?", and I think this is something that I suppose every Unionist wrestles with. Is it: Are we British? Yes. Are we English? No. Scottish? No. Welsh? No. But the Scots and the Welsh are also proud to be British. So I suppose I'm from that wee corner called Northern Ireland and I'm Northern Irish, but British, and that I think is an identity I've come now to accept.'

The participant in question understands there are numerous different aspects to Britishness, but that this does not make any one of them any less British and this should also be the norm for people from Northern Ireland too.

5.4: Difference and Unity?

When conducting the interviews it was interesting to observe how influential events are when it came to defining identity. The most noticeable example of this was the Northern Ireland football team qualifying campaign for the 2016 Euros tournament. During this time period a higher number of participants were more forthcoming to identify as Northern Irish. For example, after one qualifying match Interviewee 15 (2015) stated 'I like to look at myself as Northern Irish as well, you

know?' and that it 'was great last night being Northern Irish, you know? Whenever they won the football.' Sport is a major influence on identity and for the participants involved this was often the case. In regards to the sociological study of identity this is not a new phenomenon (Houlihan, 1997; Bairner, 2015). Sporting events bring people together in solidarity and act as a glue to help bind society together. Often this type of identity is expressed as taking over from the role of religion in society, but the thesis argues that in regards to Northern Ireland Unionism, it instead creates an alternative narrative of national identity, one which is created and influenced by sport rather than traditionally binary and sectarian notions of identity which have been prevalent in Northern Ireland for the past four decades. This allows individuals from the Unionist community a way of holding onto a Northern Irish or Irish identity by challenging, yet simultaneously conforming to, the tribal definitions of identity which have traditionally been available to them. Sport allows individuals to hold onto these identities as cultural identities and these therefore do not necessarily have any impact upon the definitive political identities in Northern Ireland. The Northern Ireland football team may have qualified for the Euros, but the electorate still cast their vote along traditional identity lines during the 2016 Assembly Election highlighting that while a Northern Irish identity may exist, this does not necessarily transfer into support for central parties (Belfast Telegraph, 2016b).

One possible explanation for this is that the context of a Northern Irish Identity has changed. Since the Troubles, the Northern Irish identity has been viewed within Unionism with suspicion. Previous to this, a Northern Irish, or distinctively 'Ulster' identity, was seen as normal, yet with the commencement of the Troubles and the tribalism of identity into an 'us or them' mentality, Northern Irishness can be seen as a step closer to Irishness than Britishness, a subtle move away from the Union. Richard Rose has provided the most research on this area in *Governing without consensus: An Irish Perspective* (1971). Rose observed during his study that 32% of Protestant participants classified their national identity as Ulster, along with 5% of Catholic participants (1971: 208). Therefore, the current trend of an increase in a Northern Irish, or Ulster, identity is not a new phenomenon within *Ulster* Unionism,

but rather a 'Back to the Future' style occurrence showing the return of identity to more normalised levels nineteen years after the signing of the Good Friday Agreement.

The question that needs to be asked is: why now? One answer for this may be that Rose's study was conducted at the beginning of the Troubles, before the full scale of polarisation occurred. Worchel *et al* theorised that 'Social identity theory makes a strong case that people strive for the best possible self-image. A threat to this self-image should motivate efforts to repair the damage and raise esteem' and this may be exactly what is happening in regards to the return to favour of the Northern Irish identity (2000: 28). Northern Ireland has moved out of the Troubles and it is now almost two decades since the Good Friday Agreement. Based on this, it can be observed that Northern Irish society is moving away from 'Troubles' identity towards the pre-Troubles concepts of identity. As outlined by Interviewee 3 (2015):

> 'I think that Northern Irish identity is something that is becoming stronger and stronger as we start to mature. Umm, I think, you know, obviously the peace process and devolution coming here in the way that it did has very much put Northern Ireland on the map … I think that Northern Irish identity is something that is there, and I think in the coming years it's going to become even stronger.'

While this is an interesting prediction, Northern Irish identity is still held by only a minority within Northern Ireland. Muldoon *et al* (2007) found that since the Good Friday Agreement only around one in five Catholics and Protestants have stated Northern Irish identity in surveys. The 2007 Northern Ireland Life and Times survey found that Protestants are more likely to feel 'very strongly' that they are Northern Irish at 56% compared to 43% of Catholics. This may again to a reference to the perception that Northern Irish is more British in nature. It can also be seen as a more modern take on the Ulster identity. This is interesting, as to define as an identity not normally heard within the public rhetoric surrounding your community may put an individual at odds with others within their community, or it may be a way of expanding the identity which a group may have. The Northern Irish identity is a way of filling the centre ground to connect both communities through mutually

shared aspects of identity. As stated by Jenkins, 'People collectively identify themselves and others, and they conduct their everyday lives in terms of those identities, which therefore have practical consequences' (1996: 89). Interviewee 16 (2015), also felt that the Northern Irish identity could be a way of encouraging more people within Northern Ireland to support the Union:

> 'I think there is something about creating a Northern Irish identity, because Northern Ireland is slightly different from the rest of Ireland and it unifies us because there are maybe people from a very nationalist background that feel Northern Irish and know that we are slightly different'.

The difference between how Unionists and Nationalists view Northern Irish identity is worth mentioning. For *Ulster* Unionists it refers to being from Northern Ireland as a part of the United Kingdom, similar to the way in which an individual from England would state that they are English. For Irish Nationalists on the other hand Northern Irish refers to being from Ireland, but from the North rather than the South. Research by Muldoon *et al* (2007: 91) has shown that the Northern Irish identity is 'preferred by one in five Catholics in the post-Agreement surveys'. This is a means of maintaining an Irish connection, whilst also expressing an affinity to Northern Ireland.

To define as British is to acknowledge Northern Ireland as a region of the United Kingdom, something which is still contested by parts of the Northern Irish community in the aftermath of the Troubles, '… mine is Northern Irish, but with a strong British hue' (Interviewee 13, 2015). To state identity as Northern Ireland, on the other hand, was almost seen to promote Northern Ireland as its own distinctive area separate from the Union, and subsequently can be too close to the expression 'the North *of* Ireland' for Unionists since the Troubles to be entirely comfortable with it. The use of the Northern Irish identity by participants in this study may be little more than a modern interpretation of the Ulster identity discovered by Rose in 1968. However, the surprise success of the Northern Irish football team in qualifying for the 2016 Euros provided a more inclusive context for a Northern Irish identity to thrive. Interviewee 14 (2015), stated that they were:

> ‘very happy and delighted and loved the fact last night that NI has got through to the European Championships you know and you know I’m one of those people who would be very supportive of that.’

It no longer seemed to be viewed as an on the fence position, a middle ground to Irishness and Britishness. Now, Northern Irishness has returned to being a way of publically expressing pride in the geographical region of Northern Ireland (Rose, 1971: 207-208; Dahrendorf, 1982: 131). As Interviewee 13 put it (2015):

> ‘I think I would describe myself as Northern Irish and I’m going to be there tomorrow night when we qualify for Europe, I’m going to be cheering the head off of me with the green and white army and I feel far more affinity to that that I would to a British team. So I would regard myself as Northern Irish, proudly Northern Irish and I think that Northern Ireland because it’s been around now for almost 100 years it’s now a sort of its chiselled out an identity in its own right.’

Nowadays, identity in Northern Ireland is much more safeguarded on both sides of the community divide by the Good Friday Agreement of 1998. Individuals in Northern Irish society now have more choice on how they define their own identity, at least in official studies such as the 2011 Northern Ireland Census which has recently added the option of ‘Northern Irish’ to their identity choices (2014). Within this postmodern global society, individuals can chose which elements of separate identities suit them best (Giddens, 1991). Identity is a deeply personal component of human nature and one which is not consistent. Identity can change depending on many different factors, such as sporting events, travel to different countries, where an individual lives, and also by what political events are happening at any given moment in time. Identity can be much more personal than political or religious influences. It can refer to being a parent, a sibling, a member of a certain profession. For many individuals, their identity will be made up of numerous identities, not all of which would naturally be thought of as being compatible. At different periods during the course of a life, a year, a day even, different identities will rise up to take precedence over an individual, an adaptation which is as unconscious as swapping over a hat. As stated by Interviewee 4 (2015):

> 'I'm comfortable within … my skin to be an Irishman, an Ulsterman, ah, a man from Northern Ireland, and being British. So that's probably, in a roundabout way, I'm comfortable in my skin. I'm comfortable and I'm confident in who I am and there's no reason why an individual can't be multi-faceted.'

This shows *Ulster* Unionists know who they are: the real difficulty lies in trying to get other people to accept their identity. As outlined in the fear of belonging framework described in Chapter Four, Irish Nationalists and people from Great Britain do not see *Ulster* Unionists as British. However, a recent survey by YouGov (2017) actually shows that the majority of people within Great Britain actually view Northern Ireland as being British, with a total of 75% of respondents agreeing that *I DO consider them* [people from Northern Ireland] *to be British.* If this is the case, why then do Unionists still fear that they are not viewed as British by those within Great Britain? The consequence of this fear of not belonging has been for *Ulster* Unionists to try to show their identity and to adapt it until it can no longer be questioned. The result of this is that the new hyperversion of Britishness observed in Northern Ireland further alienates their neighbours in Great Britain, leading to the circle continuing over and over again. This hyperversion of Britishness is a method by which to reinforce their Britishness, as *Ulster* Unionists feel more affinity to the United Kingdom than they do to their neighbours in the Republic of Ireland (Southern, 2007).

When studying the identity of Unionist designated politicians, this ability for identity to evolve is interesting. Can politics in Northern Ireland continue to be fought along the same old ethno-national divides whenever for many of the electorate their own identity is no -longer as clear cut as *us or them*? The answer to this – for now - is yes. This reverting towards a complexity of identities in Northern Ireland can be seen in the results of the 2011 census in which 21% of the population defined solely as Northern Irish, compared to Britishness at 40% and Irish at 25% (Clarke, 2012).

> '…many nationalists are also happy to call themselves NI. I think that is a good thing. I think it brings stability and a sense of pride in where we are and people who describe themselves as NI can be either British or Irish in

> terms of their political aspirations but still have a proudness of their part of the world' (Interviewee 11, 2015).

If Unionism in Northern Ireland is to survive, it must widen its political appeal. As Interviewee 19 (2015) said:

> 'I think it is important, I suppose, as politicians in Northern Ireland, I suppose as unionist politicians, to reach out to nationalists, you know. People feel comfortable, I think that people feel comfortable, with the United Ireland - within Northern Ireland … I think it's important that we must umm reach out to the other community too.'

Numerous different identities, not merely Britishness, were outlined by participants. Some participants even expressed that they held a plurality of identities. Interviewee 20 put it this way (2015):

> 'when I tick a nationality box I have no difficulty saying I'm British, in fact that's my choice and I want to be British and I don't have an Irish passport, but as somebody who lives on Ireland … I am happy to say I'm Irish … Umm, but I think it's the nature of Northern Ireland that we have almost interchangeable, or chameleon like, identities.'

Interviewee 2 (2015) perhaps best expresses how contradictory and multi-layered identity can be in the answer:

> 'First and foremost I feel I'm an Ulsterman and that is that I feel that I'm not English. I'm not a little Englishman. I'm not Scottish, but I have Scottish roots. But I am very much a part and parcel of this island, that I'm proud of being born on this island. Umm, that I reclaim it for me. That I'm proud of my Irish heritage as much as I am of my Scottish and British heritage, but I am first and foremost very provincial and I'm an Ulsterman. Umm, but there is something that just makes our character very different. Yes prickly, and thran, and stubborn, but at the same time a very kind natured people and open to others. We might not like each other, but we like everyone else, you know? And that's the thing I think is just a characteristic of this place, that when people say we're very warm and lovely people, yes, we are to others, but not to ourselves.'

This reference to being unkind to those from other identities is a direct result of the stark ethno-national divide and the polarisation of identity which resulted from the period of ethno-national conflict in Northern Ireland known as the Troubles. Since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, identity still remains a contentious and highly emotive subject in Northern Ireland.

> 'I still feel that we are British. I think most people in Northern Ireland, and I actually think most people in Scotland, are proud to be British as well. Ah, umm, yes I'm for Northern Ireland. I'm a proud Ulsterman. I have an Irish background because I'm from Northern Ireland, but I am British, and I certainly view, ah, very proudly my position within the United Kingdom as being a British citizen from Northern Ireland' (Interviewee 6, 2015).

Within the context of Northern Ireland there are many identities available to individuals that reflect the very personal aspects of a person's character. 'I suppose I've always regarded myself as British, but I can identify with the Irish connection as well that we have. So, it's probably for me a parade of identities' (Interviewee 18).

Belfast born poet John Hewitt is well known for his promotion of regionalism through his writings of being 'an Ulsterman, an Irishman, British and European' (cited Carruthers, 2015; Longley, 1986). Participants of this research also multiple identities along the familiar lines of Hewitt, 'So, ah, as John Hewitt once put it, although I don't think he actually said it, but the sentiment is: I'm an Ulsterman, Irish, British, European' (Interviewee 7, 2015). Interviewee 20 (2015) succinctly described this as:

> 'I don't want to get to the John Hewitt type line of being an Ulsterman, a British man and Irishman a European [laughs] umm, but I think it's the nature of Northern Ireland that we have almost interchangeable, or chameleon-like, identities. But East Belfast first and foremost' (Interviewee 20, 2015).

This was particularly obvious in Interviewee 16's view that 'I would define myself as an Ulsterman, as Northern Irish, as Irish, as British and as European' (2015). Other participants expressed this view in all but attributing the words to Hewitt as they sought to express their identity through the larger entity of identity.

> 'I would define myself as an Ulsterman, as Northern Irish, as Irish, as British, and as European. I carry a British passport but … I have said in the chamber before I am Irish. I was born on this island and lived all my life here' (Interviewee 16, 2015).

The geographical position of where one lives seems to have had a direct impact upon how participants to the research defined their identity. One of the most

unique aspects of Northern Ireland is its geographic position and how much it is influenced by the countries that it is surrounded by. This positioning within the world allows individuals from Northern Ireland to experience multiple identities on a daily bases, even if they are not quite aware of it themselves. As described by Interviewee 8 (2015):

> 'Well there's no doubt I am a Unionist … I start off that I'm an [name of place] man … which makes me an Ulsterman, which makes me an Irish man. That is all taken for granted because that is what I am. Umm, well, I am also a British subject. I'm a British citizen because I live in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and I believe that that link between Northern Ireland and Great Britain should be there'.

One interesting observation that emerged on the issue of classification of identity came from Interviewee 24 who discussed their perceived opinions of the differences between members of the Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist community and the Catholic/Nationalist/Republican community when it came to discussing identity. As the data contained in this chapter illustrated, there are numerous combinations of identity that can be experienced and accepted under the overarching umbrella of Britishness by Unionists in Northern Ireland. Interviewee 24 expressed concern that while they believed a multi-faceted approach to identity was acceptable for members of the Catholic/Nationalist/Republican community, that the same could not be said of members of the Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist community. For Interviewee 24, they felt that to say they held more than one identity as a Unionists was providing an opportunity for Nationalists to see Unionism as being in a state of confusion over its identity:

> 'You are confused, you are having an identity crisis. You don't know what you are! "I know what I am!", they will say, "I am green, Irish, Gaelic, all the rest of it." It is a neat package. "You are confused. You are a pick and mix, and you don't know what you are. Are you an Ulsterman or are you British? What are you?"' (Interviewee 24, 2015).

This concern that to express multiple identities is to throw into doubt a Unionists sense of self is a validation of arguments in Chapter Four that discussed the nature of self-doubt as an inherent component of Unionism. The presence of doubt within

Unionism cannot be ignored. This doubt, as outlined in Chapter Four, does not come from *Ulster* Unionists themselves, but from outside forces such as Irish Nationalists and the British and Irish governments. It is, however, a paradox: to refute the claim that Unionism is inherently shaped by doubt is to openly express the fragility of Unionism in that the possibility of doubt is so damaging a concept that it cannot even be expressed. The thesis argues that doubt is *not* necessarily a negative in this context. It is an important aspect of the very nature of Unionism and it has enabled it to flourish and maintain its position as the largest political and ethno-national groupings within Northern Ireland. To summarise that which has been discussed in Chapter Four, doubt experienced from outside sources can strengthen identity within Unionism. During the Troubles the IRA shook Unionists to their core by undertaking a campaign to break up the Union and unify Ireland by force, yet rather than destroying Unionism it instead forced it to forge a stronger version of British identity, one that could withstand the constant doubt by purposefully reinforcing the importance of the Union and the importance of Britishness for Northern Ireland (see Chapter Four, section 3.4). To take the example of Interviewee 24 and to extrapolate upon that example in line with the theoretical framework they recognise there is doubt in their identity and the number of potential combinations of identity that they can simultaneous hold (Schrödinger, 1935); in thinking about the doubtful nature of their identity they in fact realise that their identity does in fact exist (Descartes, as in Wilson, 1978: 52); and therefore developing an overarching sense of Britishness to their identity which can be viewed as being unique to the Northern Ireland experience (Baudrillard, 1994: 6).

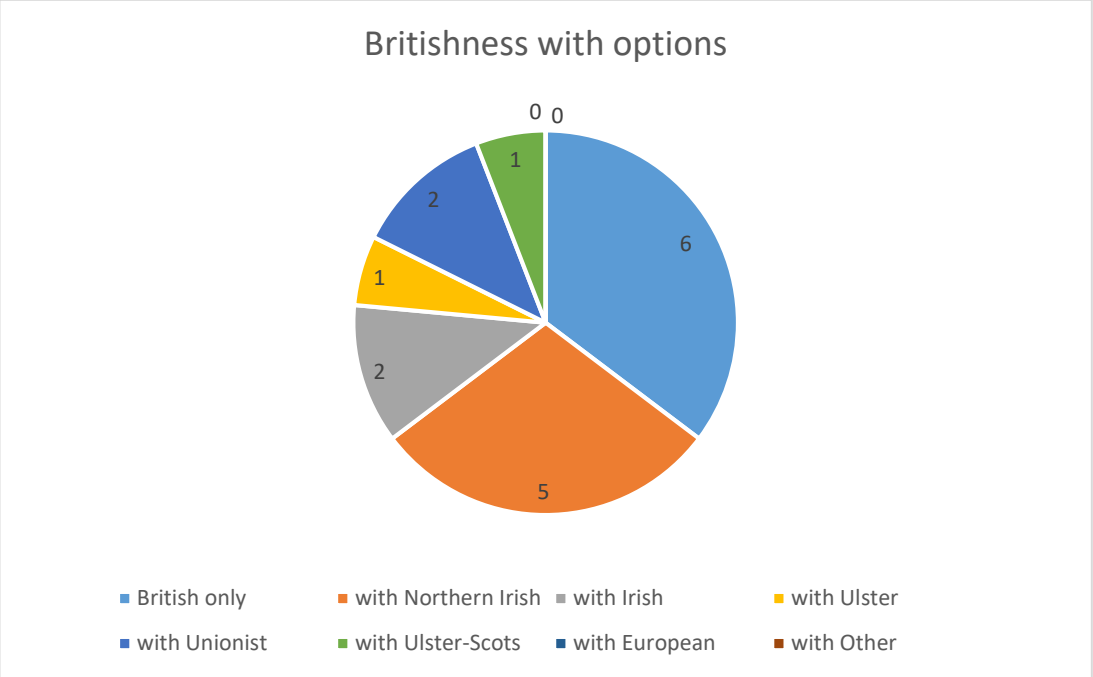
This is interesting when one looks at how individuals conceptually can be categorised into groups within society. According to Althusser (1971; Fiske, 1998: 697-698), individuals are *interpellated* into social groups, meaning the process by which one is assigned an identity through the process of being *hailed* by another member of society, usually someone who is in a position of power to promote the dominant ideology. Generally in Marxist terminology this refers to the promotion

of ideology through identity and can be observed in Interviewee 24's comment. By being hailed as 'confused', both their ideology and identity is challenged. This consequently may lead to a reinforcement of their identity through exaggeration, for example, by engaging in a more concentrated version of Britishness to counter what they feel is an attack on their identity by Nationalism (Baudrillard, 1983). According to Habermas: 'To experience yourself as a constitutional patriot would be to recognize yourself in a constitutional patriotic interpellation', meaning that to be seen as a member of a community or nation would be in essence to be a member of that community or nation' (Donald, 1996: 175). However, promoting a political identity over cultural identity leaves too much out in regards to our understanding of identity. Both concepts exist and as such need to be discussed. One cannot be forgotten or left out of academic debate surrounding identity as this would be detrimental to the study. Hence the value of 'elective affinity' as this thesis has argued.

As the unity in diversity trope of this thesis argued within Chapter Two, individuals within the United Kingdom do not have to be the same or share the same values to co-exist within the Union (Goodhart, 2017: 22). Ethnic and civic differences can exist side-by-side, so long as there is the combination of political representation and a feeling of affinity towards the United Kingdom.

Fig 5.2. Britishness with options

This chart shows the breakdown, in numbers, of the sixteen participants who viewed their identity as British, and as British with another identity. Six participants expressed their identity as solely British, while eleven described their identity as British along with another identity, such as Northern Irish.



Throughout the interviews, participants also expressed affinity to an Ulster or an Ulster-Scots identity. Nine of the Participants interviewed described themselves as having an Ulster dimension to their identity. Four participants mentioned that Ulster-Scots made up part of their identity, with one participant stating their identity was solely that of Ulster-Scots, 'Well I am an Ulster-Scot. I am an Ulster-Scot by birth, by culture and by choice, I suppose' (Interviewee 21, 2015). What Interviewee 21 highlighted is the role elective affinity plays within the formation of national identities. The statement 'by culture and by choice' shows the importance of choice within the decision making process, but also that a shared sense of belonging is necessary as well. Without both components working together, the identity would be fragile indeed. The reasons expressed for this Ulster-centric approach to identity from some participants seems to be that of a pride in Ulster and of its place in the United Kingdom. According to Interviewee 2 (2015):

> 'my culture and my identity is very much of an Ulsterman first, and with that becomes a sense of Britishness and it's not just as we said before, a little homogenous Irishman, or a little Englishman. It is a British person whose identity is a collection of views and values from across these islands.'

Other participants, such as Interviewee 20 (2015), wanted to keep their identity closer to home, 'Let's see, how would I define my identity? Ah, I'm a [name of place] man first and foremost [laughs]. Umm … I mean I'm an Ulster man'.

One participant expressed an Ulster-Scots identity, stating '… that sense of Britishness is the overarching one and then under that is my regional identity … an Ulster identity. My cultural identity would be predominantly Ulster-Scots' (Interviewee 24, 2015). Ulster-Scots is an interesting identity, highlighting a sense of affinity between Northern Ireland and Scotland in particular (Stapleton and Wilson, 2004: 564-565). It is also interesting in regards to how it can be read as an identity, as Ulster-Scots can be viewed as either a form of nationalism or as a component of Britishness (McCall, 2010: 212-214). If Ulster is the national identity, Ulster-Scots can make a fitting cultural element of this as it equally promotes a connection to the Union whilst understanding that Northern Ireland has its own unique aspects which cannot be forgotten. Ulster-Scots in Northern Ireland is undergoing a resurgence in popularity (Nic Craith, 2001: 30). In recent years there have been increased initiatives to promote it as a language, yet these often do not allow the Ulster-Scots language the same level of inclusion as Irish. For example, in 2017 Belfast City Council released a public consultation surrounding its policies on minority languages, including Ulster-Scots and Irish. However, while the Council has planned to provide all correspondence in Irish, it has only stated that it will do so with Ulster-Scots if 'it is possible' (Belfast Telegraph, 2017).

According to Cochrane (1997) Northern Ireland Unionism is both an ideology and a cultural identity which aims to maintain membership of the United Kingdom. This reading of *Ulster* Unionism sees Britishness as entirely self-serving in that it is only a means by which the Unionist community can dominate the Nationalist community. What Unionist Britishness is in this sense is little more than an instrumental relationship. Cochrane fails to take into account the solidarity and identity aspects of this relationship. *Ulster* Unionists do not merely support the Union because it provides more instrumental advantages than a United Ireland, but because they feel they are a part of the United Kingdom and that they belong to this Union.

According to Lawther (2013: 159), 'unionism seeks to preserve the union between Northern Ireland and Great Britain and is based on a sense of loyalty to and sacrifice on behalf of the British state'. Unionism works to promote a unique sense of British identity within an Ulster context. The objective of Unionism is to promote British identity as the national identity of Northern Ireland through a blend of politics, culture and religion. Currently, Unionism within Northern Ireland represents the largest section of the population, both in terms of political alignment and identity. An interesting method of explaining the success of Unionism in promoting British identity is Goodhart's (2013: 292) statement that 'if a national identity is, like an iceberg, mainly beneath the surface, it is not much use in helping to create a sense of common interest or belonging. For that to happen, a critical mass of the population still have … to see their national identity as something meaningful and active'. Therefore, to maintain a sense of British national identity within Northern Ireland, Unionists must be willing to promote and maintain the benefits of being a part of the United Kingdom. Within a political context, this is mainly the function of both the Democratic Unionist Party and the Ulster Unionist Party. Through party policy and electioneering, political parties promote and disseminate their own views of identity.

Interviewee 11 (2015) discusses the difficulty in trying to define Unionism: 'It's very difficult. I mean, you have so many different identities and people say, "Well I'm a Unionist", but Unionism itself is such a broad term. You have people on the left, and right, and everywhere. Umm, I would probably see myself as someone who is centre right Unionist. I would be fairly fiscally conservative. I would be a little bit more socially moderate perhaps than some of my colleagues would be.' Of the thirty-four interviews, six discussed the role of Unionism in their identity, and for two of these, Unionism was the sole identity they identified as. According to Interviewee 1 (2015), 'Ah, my identity is Unionist. I would consider myself to be a traditional unionist'. Interviewee 29 (2016) also stated 'Well, I would class myself as a unionist.' For these participants, Unionism is a component of Britishness. If

Nationalism in Northern Ireland is seen as the political aspect to Irishness then Unionism can be viewed as the political component to Britishness.

The question of whether a Unionist can be Irish is one that is contentious. Eight participants mentioned Irish as part of their identity and one stated Irish as their first identity, arguing that 'I… believe in my Irishness and my Britishness and there is no conflict for me in any shape and form, although some people don't quite understand it' (Interviewee 33). One of the ways this is expressed is through support of the Irish rugby team: 'I am happy to say I'm Irish, happy to follow the Irish rugby team and so on' (Interviewee 20, 2015). This allows for Unionists to support Ireland as a *national team*, but with a distinctive Ulster dimension to it, as Ulster rugby players play for the Irish national team. As Interviewee 18 (2015) stated, 'I would probably support the Ireland rugby team over Scotland, England, or Wales if they were playing when it comes to the Six Nations. I would have a preference for Ireland to win. Umm, now that would be because of the Ulster connections, umm, the Rory Bests' of this world, ah, the Andrew Trimbles', you know. So you can identify with people from Northern Ireland who are playing in the Irish rugby team and so I would be cheering on Ireland, umm, over the other six nations.'

Not all Unionists are willing to allow themselves to view Irishness as anything other than a threat to their identity and their lifestyle. For some participants it was important that Irish was *not* part of their identity in any way. Participants felt they had to raise this fact themselves to state that Irishness does not represent them. As Interviewee 13 (2015) observed, 'No part of my identity is Irish at all and I can't fathom, well, there isn't any identity of Irish in me because our family has been entirely British, Northern Irish.' For some participants this was due to the nature of Republican and Nationalist politics, 'I have no desire to enter into a Republic of any description…' (Interviewee 17, 2015). In cases like this the Irish identity was closely connected in the participant's consciousness to that of the aspiration by many in the Catholic/Nationalist/Republican community to create a United Ireland.

Similarly, this could be reversed to state that someone from an Irish background may reject the label of British because they do not wish to be a part of the United Kingdom and see themselves and Northern Ireland as being a part of a United Ireland. For others, such as Interviewee 23, (2015), the reasoning for not being Irish was that 'I never would have termed myself as Irish, because I believe that I am totally different in every way to someone people believe to be your typical Irish…' (Interviewee 23, 2015). Yet, as argued by Newton Emerson (2016), 'surprisingly few unionists see it as a process of diluting Britishness'. Why is this? Emerson observed that the popularisation of a Northern Irish identity does not diminish Britishness as this is constantly being reinforced via direct rule and the media, meaning that the two identities can, and do, coexist harmoniously. Irishness, as shown by the participants' responses, does not have a huge bearing on their identity. This can be argued by two reasons. The first is that *Ulster* Unionists do not have any allegiance towards the Republic of Ireland and the second is they do not feel a sense of belonging to it either. As observed by McVeigh (2015: 127), 'The existential choice between "Ulster" and "Irish" identity is the definitive political choice for northern Protestants.' What is perhaps most interesting about McVeigh's statement is the fact that 'British' is not mentioned at all. This highlights Irish Republicanism as being one of the outside forces that contributes to the fear of not belonging discussed throughout this thesis. The above statement suggests that *Ulster* Unionists are wrong in believing that their identity is British as they are truly Irish. In this context, to say that one has an Ulster identity is actually a way in which to reinforce the idea that *Ulster* Unionists are in fact Irish as Ulster is one of the provinces of Ireland.

Of the thirty-four participants interviewed, three stated religion played a major role in their identity, with one participant stating that their Christian faith was their only identity, 'Umm, how do I define my identity? Well, as a person of faith that obviously comes first and foremost. I feel my faith plays a huge part in my life. So I think as a Christian that defines an awful lot of who I am' (Interviewee 25, 2016). Until the interview stage it was not anticipated that any participants would discuss

religion in the identity section. As described by Hearn, it is often imagined within sociological thinking that the '…national community' can be viewed '…as a modern replacement for religious community' (2006: 4). Thinkers such as Anderson have come to 'think that in a world where God is for many, if not dead, in semi-retirement, the nation is called upon to provide an alternative source of moral grounding, not just in the sense of something blessed, but in providing the ultimate judges of our actions in the present' (Hearn, 2006: 226). Yet for three participants this was not the case, confirming previous research on Unionism which found a heavily religious orientated faction within Unionism in Northern Ireland (Bruce, 2001; Bruce, 2007; Southern, 2005). One participant stated Christian, another evangelical Protestant, and the third, Presbyterian. This also ties in with traditional Christian teachings such as the verse, **'**and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority' (Colossians, 2:10).

5.5: Conclusion

To say that members of the Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist community can only have a British or Ulster identity is misleading. The notion that to be Unionist is to be British can again be argued as a result of the polarising aspect of the Troubles. Within the context of the violence in Northern Ireland, the very existence of the state which Unionists inhabited and called home was constitutionally threatened. Therefore, no ground could afford to be lost to the Catholic/National/Republican community which was campaigning for Irish unity. To define oneself as anything other than British was to dilute Northern Ireland as a region of the United Kingdom. As Gellner argued, 'The deeply rooted communal conflict in Ulster is not based, obviously, on any communications gap between the two communities, but on an identification with one of two rival local cultures which is so firm as to be comparable to some physical characteristic, even if, in reality, it is socially induced' (1983: 71). Within this context other identities were viewed as a threat to the constitution. Identities such as Northern Ireland were viewed with mistrust within the Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist community as not being a middle ground, but as a

concession to Irish Nationalism, and therefore a stepping stone towards separation from the United Kingdom and reformation with the Irish Republic. This thesis argued that this is no longer the case. Northern Irish society is now nineteen years post Good Friday Agreement and society is becoming more accepting to breaking down the sectarian barriers of the past. For example, the 2011 census, for the first time, added Northern Irish to the category on identity, a move which proved popular with the population at large and with the participants of this thesis (Sedghi, 2012). Interviewee 13 (2015) observed:

> 'That's an interesting one because in the last census there were four folk in our house. Two filled in they were from Northern Ireland and two filled in that they were British. Now that made me think. I think I would describe myself as Northern Irish … So I would regard myself as Northern Irish, proudly Northern Irish and I think that Northern Ireland because it's been around now for almost 100 years it's now sort of its chiselled out an identity in its own right.'

The identity of Unionist designated politicians, therefore, is not straightforward. As expressed by Interviewee 7 (2015), '…the big political challenge of the twenty-first century is resolving this tension between the sovereignty of the piece of land you're living and the identity which you wish to align yourself to.' How Unionism will do this is yet to be seen, but it is an opportunity they cannot afford to let slip away. As Bauman observed, 'It soon transpired that the real problem is not how to build identity, but how to preserve it; whatever you may build in the sand is unlikely to be a castle' (1996: 23). To put it simply, 'I'm proud of being Northern Irish too … I'm British you know, but I'm Northern Irish' (Interviewee 19). Unionism in Northern Ireland can simultaneously be viewed as both unchanging and changeable. Although traditional identities and social conservatisms are still prevalent within Unionism in Ulster, change can and is being seen to develop within the two largest Unionist parties, the Democratic Unionist Party and the Ulster Unionist Party, such as in the Ulster Unionist Party's conscience votes on moral issues. To say that these perceived changes mark a new trajectory for Unionism may be premature. If the attitudes to identity and Unionism outlined in this chapter continue, it may be

possible that Unionism can make a change which would enable it to appeal to a much wider section of the Northern Irish electorate. With Unionism across the United Kingdom, threatened by political events such as the Scottish independence referendum and the European referendum, perhaps the only way for Unionism in Northern Ireland to continue is for it to change.

These findings show is that elements of both contractual thinking and primordialism exist within Ulster Britishness. Both are vital components of *Ulster* Unionist identity. While the instrumental reasons given by the participants in regards to maintaining and promoting the Union are important, these connections would never have been sustained without the Ulster British sense of belonging to the United Kingdom. Together these themes may be understood in terms of elective affinity and the role it plays in binding Northern Ireland and Great Britain. In regards to the negative interpretation of Ulster British portrayed within this thesis, one can observe from the answers provided by the participants that they themselves feel generally secure and confident in their identity (see Chapter Four, section 4.2). This reinforces the argument of Chapter Four that the Unionist fear of belonging does not come from the *Ulster* Unionists themselves, but mainly from without. Each region of the United Kingdom contains its own regional identities as well as the overarching national identity of British. Northern Ireland is no different in this regard (see Chapter Two). What these findings mean will be discussed further in Chapter Nine. Before that, the impact of major political events within the United Kingdom and the future of the Union must be considered.

Chapter Six

Questions of British Unionism

6.1: Introduction

Identity generally tends to be discussed whenever it is deemed to be having a 'crisis'. Identity and nationhood are questions which are currently at the forefront of British politics (McCrone, 1997: 581). Events such as the Scottish independence referendum of 18th September 2014 have shown how fragile the ties which bind the Union can be. The Scottish independence referendum was challenging to the United Kingdom in two ways. First, it highlighted how devolution could eventually lead to the break-up of the United Kingdom as once the nations receive more autonomy they may push for even more until they achieve independence (which is an old Irish Unionist proposition: that there is no 'half-way house' between unity and separation). Second, the Scottish independence referendum could be seen as an example of what happens whenever a large section of a region's population does not feel as though it belongs within the United Kingdom. When discussing issues of (in)stability and potential threats to the United Kingdom, it has long been an established pattern to include Northern Ireland in these conversations (Nairn, 1977: 11; CAIN, 2016; Whyte, 1991: 146). During the 1960s, the pot of sectarian tension which had been simmering dangerously finally reached boiling point, unleashing civil violence that would threaten to destabilise the Union (McKittrick and McVea, 2002: ix-x). Since the period of the Troubles in Northern Ireland, political commentators have deliberated that this could have signalled the end of the United Kingdom (Nairn, 1977), yet this did not come to pass. Although pulled recklessly taut, the ties which bound Northern Ireland to Great Britain remain in place. With the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, a certain stability emerged in Northern Ireland (NIO, 1998). The IRA's campaign of nearly 30 years had ended and a devolved mandatory coalition government was created to represent both communities (Taylor, 2009: 8-10). As the peace-process stabilised after 2006, politicians, academics and commentators alike began to consider the

Ulster Question 'solved' - insofar as 'solved' meant that it was no longer such a critical issue in British politics. The United Kingdom had survived the conflict in Northern Ireland intact.

After almost four decades in which Northern Ireland was viewed as the biggest risk to the stability and future of the Union, the real danger now came not from the West of the United Kingdom, but from the North. Scottish nationalism is by no means a new phenomenon. The events of the past influence the events of the present (Aughey, 2009: 1-2). In 2010, the then Scottish First Minister and Leader of the Scottish Nationalist Party, Alex Salmond announced that Scotland should hold a referendum on whether it would remain in or leave the United Kingdom (Carrell, 2010). As Nairn (1977:127) once observed of Scotland and its nationalism, 'Nowhere else has the transformation been so abrupt, or so extensive' within the United Kingdom. The request to put the question of Scottish independence to a public vote was granted by Westminster and in 2014 the referendum was held, bringing the United Kingdom dangerously close to separation. The very fact that the central sovereign government at Westminster allowed the referendum to be held shows that it is well aware of the multi-national identity of the United Kingdom and of the importance of allowing the nations to have their own say on their place in the United Kingdom. In the case of Scotland this was the 2014 referendum and for Northern Ireland this is evident in the Principle of Consent. It also highlighted the position within the United Kingdom that no nation can be forced to stay within the Union against the wishes of its people, but as of yet no nation truly has any good cause to leave it.

From Unionists in Northern Ireland, very little was heard during the Scottish debate. Instead, they watched and waited with growing concern. Having been in a position of instability themselves for so long they understood the impact this event could have. The Scottish independence referendum raised many painful concerns for Unionists from Northern Ireland. First, Scotland and Northern Ireland have

traditionally shared a close relationship. They are close geographically, culturally and historically (McBride, 1996: 8-9). Without Scotland, Northern Ireland would lose its closest neighbour in the United Kingdom, the neighbour with whom it holds a special affinity as well cultural and familial connections. Second, there was the question of what this referendum would mean to Nationalists in Northern Ireland and across the Union (Bennhold, 2014). Although like many Unionists they also tended to keep quiet during this time period, they were watching carefully to see how the result would go (Walker, 2014). If the people of Scotland voted to leave the United Kingdom, would this be the beginning of a general break-up of the United Kingdom which would build up political pressure for a United Ireland? Would one referendum on leaving the United Kingdom turn into two?

Northern Ireland has traditionally shared a close relationship with Scotland based on a history of shared religion, culture, and migration and this is especially the case for *Ulster* Unionists. These links can still be seen today in the prevalence of Presbyterianism in both regions and in the fact that outside of Northern Ireland, Scotland has more Loyal Orange Lodges than anywhere else in the United Kingdom. It can be argued that, 'Ulster Unionists have always championed the union of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, but their more particular attachment has been to Scotland rather than to England', a country with which they share more in common (Kenny, 2012). Debates over Scottish independence are not new. In 1977, Nairn wrote in *The Break-Up of Britain* about how Scotland would become 'a centre of disruptive development … and compelled, therefore, along a path of political separation' due to its history of Nationalism and anti-English sentiment (1977: 190). To break a historical tie which binds the United Kingdom is no trivial matter due to the political, legal and cultural bonds that are shared across the Union (Kenny, 2012). *Ulster* Unionists may have expected to maintain a close relationship with Scotland even if it did become independent due to the shared history and culture between the two nations, yet whether that affinity would truly be strong enough in practice remains unknown. Commentators such as de Castella and Judah (2013) have argued that although historically Northern Ireland 'shares strong cultural links

with Scotland … there has been no mention of a political bond between the two should the larger nation break away,' implying political indifference between the two countries should independence become a reality.

Participants were questioned on their opinions and views about Scotland and the impact of the referendum. Ironically, devolution after 1998 had normalised somewhat Northern Ireland's position in the United Kingdom by putting it on an equal status with Scotland and Wales. If any region within the United Kingdom is now an outsider it is England, the only part of the Union not to have a separate devolved government. Yet even for the English 'there is little apparent appetite for ending the Union' (Hazell, 2000: 278; Curtice and Seyd, 2009: 123). The constitutional issues which are being discussed in Scotland and Northern Ireland today influences the wider questions of what identity, legitimacy and sovereignty now mean in the United Kingdom (Walker, 1998). How Unionist designated politicians from Northern Ireland engage with these larger concerns can provide valuable insight into the wider United Kingdom debate surrounding belonging and identity within the twenty-first century (Aughey, 2013).

6.2: Anxiety and Reassurance?

In the run up to the referendum an almost relaxed approach by the Better Together campaign resulted in numerous panicked questions in the final few weeks before the vote. Unionism across the United Kingdom was caught metaphorically sleeping on the job. The situation was seen as a tick box exercise: of course Scotland would not vote to leave the Union. Yet as the referendum date approached and opinion polls began showing more and more support for the Leave campaign, Unionism finally woke up to the threat and began a frantic last minute endeavour to keep the United Kingdom together (Brown, 2014). Suddenly opinion polls showed that the result would be hard to call (Nardelli, 2014). The break-up of the Union, something that for decades had been discussed in regards to Northern Ireland, now seemed

genuinely on the cards in Scotland. When asked to give their thoughts on looking back at the referendum, Interviewee 2 (2015) commented that, 'I remember at the time thinking it's amazing what difference 10 years makes, where 10-15 years ago NI was the most unstable part of the Union. Today Scotland is the most unstable part of the Union and Northern Ireland's probably one of the more stable parts.' In the end, when the vote was announced Scotland had voted to remain within the United Kingdom by the margin of 55.3% to 44.7% (Hearn, 2014: 506). A victory, but not one that would be strong enough to see off the threat of Scottish nationalism 'for a generation' as it had been hoped (Aughey, 2009: 2).

As the Scottish independence referendum brought the United Kingdom dangerously close to its knees, it was necessary to hear from the participants what their views were as they watched this event unfold. To do so, this question was put to participants, enabling them to give in-depth qualitative responses:

What were your opinions of the Scottish referendum?

Table 6.1: Examples of responses on the Scottish independence referendum given by participants

Table providing a brief summary of the feelings that were expressed by participants towards to Scottish independence referendum.

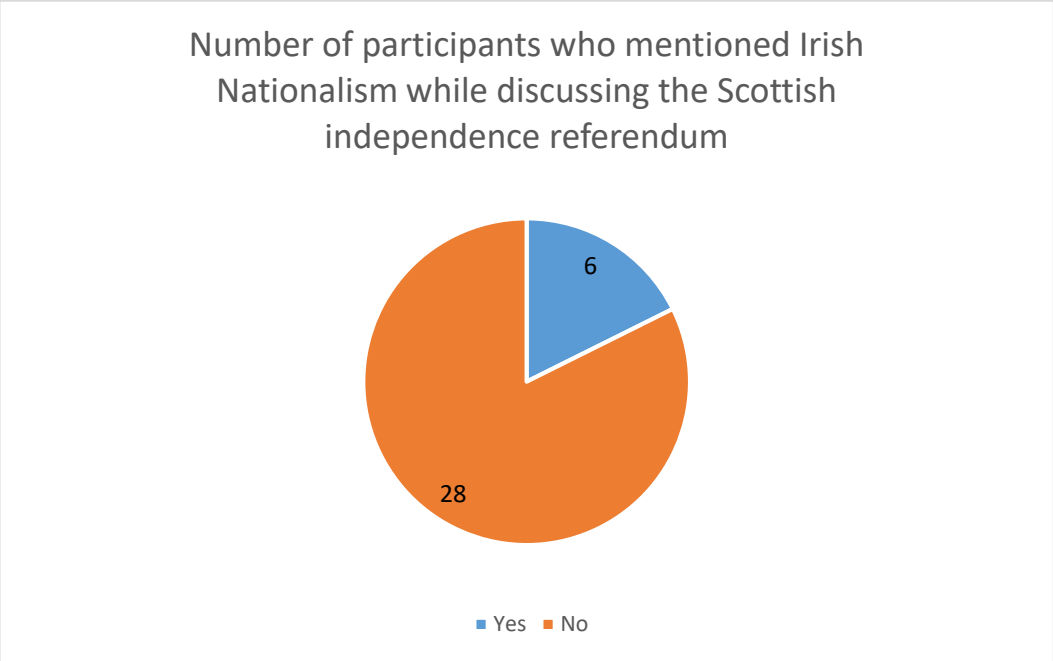
Participant	Summary of response
1	Worried in the lead up Content with the outcome Worried about the future
2	Concerned in the lead up Unsure of the future Unionists acted like they had lost instead of won 'Scotland is the most unstable part of the Union'

3	Scotland had a democratic right to the referendum The divisions this has caused in Scotland will take a long time to heal Wish that the result margin had been wider
4	The referendum was badly managed Concerned for the future More people would vote to remain in the Union from Northern Ireland than Scotland
5	Concerned in the lead up What will be done with such a close result
6	Future includes unknowns Scottish Nationalists victory in the Westminster Election 2015
7	Allows for a debate on further devolving powers away from Westminster
8	Scottish Nationalists 'played a blinder' Scotland is an integral part of the Union
9	Has implications for Northern Ireland Each region should make decisions for its own benefit with the overarching stability of the United Kingdom
10	
11	Pleased that they voted to stay This has huge implications on the future
12	Fear and trepidation in the lead up Worried for the future Scotland is a bigger threat to the Union than Northern Ireland
13	Relief, happy with result Worried about another referendum
14	Scared in the lead up Referendums depend on the question being asked
15	Nervous in the lead up Pleased with the result

	Observed, but did not want to get involved with the campaign
16	Nervous in the lead up Pleased with the result Not a fan of referendums as it all depends on the question asked
17	Aware of the history of Scotland as a separate country Family ties connecting them to Scotland Concerned as a Unionist Disruptive to Northern Ireland
18	Unionism in Northern Ireland didn't get engaged History of historical and cultural links between Northern Ireland and Scotland Can understand why Scotland wished for independence, but wanted Scotland to remain within the Union
19	Concern in the lead up Positive it was going to be a win for Remain
20	Wake up call for Unionists Need to promote the value of the Union
21	It was a difficult referendum Felt energised as this would have far reaching effects
22	'concerned that the lobby was so strong and the government was so weak'
23	Felt that people voted to leave, but hoped that they stayed
24	'How pathetic the pro-Union campaign was!'
25	Fearful in the lead up Shocked that the result was so close
26	Concerned in the lead up Scotland is stronger within the Union
27	Concerned in the lead up Glad of the result Need to encourage greater Unionism across the United Kingdom
28	Did not wish to interfere in the debate

	The unknowns around this referendum were worrying We need to make Scotland feel valued within the Union
29	Need to make Scotland feel engaged with the United Kingdom 'hoping and praying that they would vote to remain'
30	Admitted they paid very little attention to it at the start Pleased at the outcome, but surprised that the vote wasn't closer
31	The Scottish Nationalist Party wants to break up the Union
32	Felt relief at the decision Worried that Brexit has brought this up again
33	Scared of the impact this would have had on Northern Ireland
34	Pleased with the result
35	'…why do people feel detached from being British…'

Fig. 6.1: Chart showing the number of participants who mentioned Irish Nationalism whilst discussing the Scottish independence referendum.



Cultural similarities between Northern Ireland and Scotland are often viewed as two sides of the same coin in that, 'there is, in effect, little or no difference between, Ulster Scots and Scottishness … they are simply two components of the

same culture' (Wilson and Stapleton, 2006: 24). If there is substantial affinity across the Irish Sea, the Scottish connection would appear to be the 'thickest'. The term Ulster Scots can trace its roots back to the Plantation of Ulster when individuals from Scotland and England migrated to Ulster in order to settle there. The majority of Scottish settlers stayed within the North East of Ulster, leaving a legacy which lasts to this day. McCartney (2013) described this relationship as being one of solidarity and shared identity, stating that 'To grow up in Northern Ireland is to be linked to Scotland in some visceral way I can't quite explain'. The best way to describe the relationship between Scotland and Northern Ireland is through the framework of elective affinity (see Chapter Four, section 4.3). Both Northern Ireland and Scotland are connected by constitutional settlements and by the fact both choose to remain a part of the United Kingdom. Yet they are also tied by a series of historical and cultural connections which are unique to these two areas within the United Kingdom. The importance of this shared affinity was highlighted by Walker through institutions such as the Orange Order and non-Anglican Protestant denominations (1995: 62). There are also negative cultural connections which have significant influence on life in both countries, such as sectarianism. Football, in particular the clubs of Rangers and Celtic, have long been used as a metaphor for sectarian tensions within both Northern Ireland and Scotland. Sectarianism in Scotland has long been viewed as a legacy of the historical tensions Catholic and Protestant migrants from Northern Ireland brought with them to Scotland (The Scottish Government, 2013). This argument was condensed by Kenny (2012) into the statement, 'when Rangers play Celtic, which side raises a Scottish nationalist flag? Neither. Rangers considers itself "British" and flies a Union Jack while Celtic is characterised as Irish, and flies the Tricolour'.

The language of Ulster-Scots is another cultural link between the two countries (Stapleton and Wilson, 2004: 564-565). Brought to Northern Ireland 'nearly 400 years ago' by plantation settlers, Ulster-Scots is a strong cultural connection between Protestants and Unionists on both sides of the Irish Sea (Ulster Scots Agency, 2014). The 2011 census showed that 8.1% of people in Northern Ireland

had ‘some ability in Ulster-Scots’, with the percentages in North Antrim being above average with Ballymoney at 29.43% and Ballymena at 22.15% (Scots Language Centre, 2014). What an independent Scotland would do for the Ulster-Scots language is open for debate and as McCall (2002: 215) has argued:

> ‘where is the Ulster-Scots reinvention taking the Ulster unionist identity? Towards an independent Ulster? Towards an exclusive Northern Ireland within the UK? Towards alliance with Scotland? Towards a culturally enriched region of the UK, the island of Ireland, and Europe? The correct answer probably is: not very far.’

For the interviewees, the impact of the Scottish independence referendum on the close relationship between Northern Ireland and Scotland was a matter of importance. As stated by one participant, ‘Yeah, I was glad to see the result of course and so it’s – I mean, in so many ways we think that Scotland is similar to ourselves. I mean, we have that huge Scottish connection’ (Interviewee 27, 2015). Unionist politicians in Northern Ireland held a vested interest, as expressed by Interviewee 13 (2015): ‘I think there was not a Unionist in Northern Ireland who wasn’t [pleased with the result] and I’m very relieved that it went smoothly.’ This was not merely because of the threat that this referendum posed to the Union as a whole, but due to the notion that, ‘the connection between Ulster and Scotland is probably the closest historically, culturally, socially, of any of the connections’ of the United Kingdom (Interviewee 24, 2015).

For some participants the close nature of the referendum and the complacency of the pro-Union campaign led to them having to think about the possibility of losing their closest ally in the United Kingdom. This would potentially have left Northern Ireland even further out into the cold than it had been previously. As Interviewee 4 (2015) stated, ‘I believe if NI was to have a referendum, now I don’t believe we should have one, but if NI was to have a referendum tomorrow on whether we should leave the Union I think we would have a stronger link. I think we would vote more for the Union than Scottish people did, which worries me.’ This realisation that Northern Ireland for all its past issues is now more secure in the Union than

Scotland was brought home hard and fast in the last few weeks before the referendum. Even with the final result being to remain in the United Kingdom, the sentiment expressed by Interviewee 4 is correct in that it shows the disengagement from the elective affinity of the Union felt by 45% of the Scottish electorate. Moreover, for some Unionists, the biggest worry was the fear that the Scottish independence movement could have revitalised the Nationalist agenda in Northern Ireland, and possibly even result in a return to the violent conflict of the past four decades (Interviewee 16, 2015). According to Interviewee 18 (2015):

> 'There would be a fear that had Scotland decided to leave the kingdom it would have been weakened, and nationalists in Northern Ireland would have been emboldened, umm, in terms of their efforts to have a United Ireland. So, it, the basis on which I wanted Scotland to stay in was purely around the constitutional umm arrangements which exist within the Kingdom and how Northern Ireland fits into that. Umm, obviously we have you know in terms of Ulster and the Ulster-Scots connection there is, there is historical and cultural links umm with the unionist people of Northern Ireland and Scotland as well and obviously then those linkages are important to maintain'.

No matter what the outcome of the vote in Scotland had been, the result would have sent shockwaves across the United Kingdom, but if the final vote had a wider margin, say a result of 60% Remain to 40% Leave, the future of the United Kingdom would have looked much more secure than it did after the vote. Although the people of Scotland voted to remain within the United Kingdom the fact that the referendum went so far has caused concern for Unionists, 'I thought it had huge implications for Northern Ireland. Ah, it's one of those things that's going to come up again' (Interviewee 9, 2015).

Although Scotland voted to remain within the United Kingdom it is hard to envisage how the relationship between the regions of the United Kingdom could revert to being what it once was. This in part was caused by the lacklustre nature of the No campaign and the rushed concessions promised by the then Prime Minister David Cameron the morning after. As Interviewee 2 (2015) states:

> 'Well, the unionists won, but they behaved as though they lost. The PMs immediate response was hasty. He promised too much in the immediate aftermath. Instead of coming out and declaring victory he came out and decided that, oh, a 10% margin wasn't good enough, he had to then throw concessions to Scotland … I think as a result of that he then galvanised what already was a very proactive Scottish Nationalist movement. I think that that was foolish, but you can't put the toothpaste back in the tube. It's out and that mess has been created.'

It is impossible to imagine that the Scottish independence referendum of 2014 would not have had an impact upon Unionism and the status quo in Northern Ireland as the *politics* of identity – as this thesis has noted - is often easily influenced by external events and pressures (Muldoon *et al*, 2007: 92). However, the referendum also raised questions about what Scottish Nationalists saw independence as in the twenty-first century. While Alex Salmond and the Scottish Nationalist Party wanted to end the political (or constitutional) union between Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom, they were in support of maintaining the social and monetary (economic) unions. This decision shows an important dimension to the relationship between Scotland and the Union and this is where paradoxes of Britishness come into effect in the case of the Scottish independence referendum. Britishness never completely replaced nation identities within the regions or sought to do so (Gamble, 2006:22). Scottish Nationalists wish to end allegiance to the (political) Union, but they also wish to maintain affinities with it (social union). In other words, for Scottish nationalists the political Union is a *mere* contract but there are historical connections (solidarities) which are worth maintaining (social union). And finally, they do not wish to lose all of the *instrumental* benefits of being part of the United Kingdom such as having the pound sterling as their currency. Of course (as this thesis argues) instrumental cannot be divorced from non-instrumental, nor can contract from solidarity – and this was the position taken by the Conservative Government on the matter of sharing the pound or maintaining the currency union (United Kingdom, united future: Conclusions of the Scotland analysis programme, 2014). This is evident through the issues that are currently facing the proposition to hold a second Scottish independence referendum in the aftermath of the decision on Brexit. According to Interviewee 22 (2015), 'I mean I was glad of the outcome, but I was concerned that the lobby was

so strong and the government was so weak'. And as Walker put it: 'Things will never be the same again' within Northern Irish Unionism due to this referendum as it will have major impact upon relationships across the Union (cited in Farrell, 2014).

However, rather than the fault line being Northern Ireland as was previously the case particularly during the Troubles, the actual risk is now Scotland. The ball is firmly in Scotland's court. How they now choose to play this game will have massive implications for Unionism across the whole of the United Kingdom. Unionism now has to bind together and instigate defensive tactics across the United Kingdom in order to limit this threat and the potential consequences of it, 'I think it probably brought a wake-up call to those who would like to see the Union maintained' (Interviewee 30, 2016). As argued by Interviewee 20 (2015), 'it needs to provide a huge wake up call for unionists' across the United Kingdom. In Northern Ireland the implication would be for Unionism to come together to create greater cohesion in order to best promote the stability of the region within the United Kingdom. However, this unfortunately does not seem to be the case. One reason could be that divisions between the Democratic Unionist Party and the Ulster Unionist Party are too deeply entrenched to be truly forgotten. As Alex Kane has argued (2015), the two parties are 'Cut from the same cloth yet forever at war.' The two parties may put aside their differences from time to time to agree electoral pacts but remain two distinctive parties with different styles and approaches.

In the build up to the referendum, Alex Salmond, the then First Minister of Scotland, 'pledged there would not be a second Scottish independence referendum for another generation' no matter what the outcome of the vote would be (Johnson, 2014). That may have been the case, except for the influence of the European referendum of 2016. From the beginning of the Brexit campaign the Scottish National Party and its then leader, the Scottish First Minister Nicola Sturgeon, stated that Scotland wished to remain within the European Union and that if the United Kingdom voted to leave Scotland would hold another

independence referendum (Grice, 2016). This threat was a concern for some Unionists. Interviewee 14 thought (2015) 'if the UK vote to leave Europe, I believe Scotland will vote to stay in Europe and I believe that could trigger the break of the Union.' In the early hours of the morning of the 24th June 2016 this looked like it might just be a possibility as the regional referendum results came in and it was announced that Scotland had voted to remain in the European Union by 62% on a turnout of 67% (The Electoral Commission, 2016). Others interviewed for this research were not concerned by the Scottish vote. For some such as Interviewee 31 (2015) this was more of an annoyance which sought to divert attention from the real issues arising from the Brexit:

> 'Well, of course the Scottish National Party is a separatist party. They want to break up the Union, they want an independent Scotland, so one is not surprised to see the opportunity of the EU referendum to advance their argument for another referendum. I'm not sure how much credibility that argument has … I think the SNP needs to come to terms with the reality that they are part of the United Kingdom. They voted to remain in the United Kingdom, so they have to accept the verdict of the United Kingdom electorate.'

On the 13th March 2017, Nicola Sturgeon called for a second Scottish independence referendum to be held due to the outcome of the European referendum (Maguire, 2017). To date this has been blocked by Prime Minister Theresa May as due to Brexit (Watts, 2017). Clearly there is deep uncertainty linking across from Scotland to Northern Ireland (which also voted 'Remain') but that uncertainty post-Brexit has become so pervasive that it has encouraged a passive 'hope for the best' disposition. As Interviewee 1 (2015) put it, 'It's worrying where we are in relation to the UK around Scotland, but it's one that's just going to have to play out for a while and see how it goes.'

6.3: Self-rule and shared rule?

The result of the Scottish independence referendum and the ramifications of the strong Yes campaign reverberated across the United Kingdom. One of these ramifications was that the United Kingdom as a whole has been forced to take a

long hard look at the current structures of the Union, forcing them to engage directly in conversations regarding the Union and its future. Interviewee 1 (2015) stated that 'I think it has made everyone sit up, you know. The referendum subsequent to the success of the SNP has made people sit up and have a second look where as before hand people weren't interested'. For Unionists in Northern Ireland, one of the concerns that they have faced from the start of this campaign was that of Irish Nationalism being energised and revigorated by events in Scotland. Commentators, such as ex-Army Officer Crispin Black did not help matters by coming out with statements such as 'For those who still dream of a 32-county Ireland, it will be a time of opportunity' (cited Sommers, 2014). Interviewee 17 (2015) was concerned that the national divide in Scotland over independence could lead to a situation developing similar to the civil unrest which was experienced in Northern Ireland, 'I don't believe for one second it has helped the Nationalist cause in anyway in Scotland. I actually think it has divided opinion along very, ah, strong lines now and if they are not careful they will end up with an almost sectarian strife that we have seen in Northern Ireland and I think they need to be very, very careful about where they go with that debate.' This warning came from a place of friendship, the affinity of someone who has lived through it and experienced the deeply held divisions within a society once created are almost impossible to remove. Interviewee 12 (2015) also expressed this view:

> 'It worries me for the future of the Union [be]cause I think that we're now going to face the same thing in Scotland as we have faced here in Northern Ireland where aggressive nationalism will look for every opportunity to create a grievance and then from that grievance then try and make political capital. And to me, what happened in Scotland is probably a bigger threat to the Union than all of the problems that we experienced here over the period of the IRA campaign because it's much more – where people are using terrorism it actually galvanises people into resistance.'

How much impact this may have on Scottish society is yet to be seen, but remains an area of interest. The Scottish independence referendum certainly caused divisions within Scotland, an almost half and half split between those who wish to leave the United Kingdom and those who wish to remain within it. If a second referendum on Scottish independence were to be held it is not certain how this

vote would go towards healing this division. It may in fact only act to reignite the divisions that were caused by the first. It is interesting to note that some participants such as Interviewee 31 (2016) took a more pragmatic approach to the ideological stance of the Scottish Nationalist Party, stating that 'Well, of course the Scottish National Party is a separatist party. They want to break up the Union, they want an independent Scotland…' As stated by Jack (2016) 'To be fearful is sometimes to be wise' and in the case of the Scottish independence referendum this phrase rang true for *Ulster* Unionists.

From the position of the Unionist politicians interviewed for this research the feeling of unease that lingered after the referendum is in part due to the response of the Westminster government to the narrow victory to remain. The morning after the referendum David Cameron gave a press conference (Cameron, 2014). Although this highlighted that the government at Westminster was pleased with the decision of the people of Scotland to remain within the United Kingdom, the speech was full of concessions to appease Scottish nationalism, such as the promise of more powers being devolved to the Scottish Assembly. It also weakened the victory of Unionists by reigniting debates surrounding the West Lothian Question and issues regarding English Nationalism (Cameron, 2014). Instead of celebrating the success of the Remain campaign and seeking to promote a closer, more inclusive Union, it opened up a whole new debate that has the potential to weaken or erode the United Kingdom. Participants such as Interviewee 16 (2015) expressed their sincere disappointment that the reaction of the Westminster government was such that 'it didn't bury Scottish devolution, or [the] Scottish referendum for a generation.' A feeling which emerged from the interviews was that this should have been an opportunity for David Cameron to cement the United Kingdom by praising the result and by starting a national discourse on the strengths and benefits of the Union. The response showed fear from the government of what could have been and did little to encourage cohesion across the Union. An unintended, but important, consequence of this response was that it further highlighted inequalities between the regions of the United Kingdom (Mullen, 2014:

640). However, as Kenny (2014, 116) has noted, the English are traditionally supportive of the autonomy of the smaller nations of the United Kingdom and their right to have devolved institutions. The lack of Westminster involvement then can be observed as allowing Scotland the space it needed to decide whether self-rule or shared rule was the right choice for it as a nation.

As observed by Interviewee 5 (2015), 'I think the problem I suppose has been that that, a) we had a referendum that got relatively close and b) then that it has created a certain level of energy from a separatist point of view and I think that's something again that people would find ah quite worrying.' Devolution in the United Kingdom can only work when a strong central government supports the other smaller regions and allows them to make certain decisions within a safe space. This was outlined in the statement by Interviewee 9 (2015):

> 'So in the UK we almost need to look at ourselves as, you know, the various tiers in that the UK in itself is the overarching tier, but within each of our own regions we can actually make decisions, what's right for us, and don't have to include the other parts. And I think, I think we're very different in the different regions within the UK. I think it's important that we're able to do that but still we'll have that overarching stability of the UK.'

This quote highlights the fact that the United Kingdom should be considered as a whole and not only as its individual parts. The Unionist political focus should be not only on 'self rule' but also on 'shared rule' (Elazar, 1987). This relationship was understood by interviewees in the following way.

Devolution is important in what it represents for people more so than what it actually achieves (Kay, 2003: 176). This is why it holds value for both Nationalists and Unionists. For Nationalists it can be seen as a step towards the dissolution of the United Kingdom, while for Unionists it can be viewed as a method of ensuring the continuation of the Union whilst allowing regional identities space to flourish and co-exist, this being partially due to national identities being more important in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales than they are in England (Bond and Rosie,

2010: 99; Bechhofer and McCrone, 2012: 1351). Many participants expressed concern that the events of the Scottish independence referendum could have led to greater devolution across the United Kingdom (Interviewee 1, 2015; Interviewee 2, 2015). The majority of the participants interviewed expressed traditional Unionist views that in the United Kingdom the Westminster government must be the largest holder of political power and were '…quite sceptical on how far we should push devolution' (Interviewee 2, 2015). Any attempts to disperse power away from Westminster could be seen as diluting the sovereignty of the United Kingdom and as another step down the road towards the weakening of the Union. As Interviewee 8 (2015) has expressed, 'Scotland, like ourselves and Wales, to me is an integral part of the union and I want to see all four nations staying together because that's … what our strength is … I think we need the strength of that United Kingdom.' From this position, 'Devolution has always got to be limited and keep central power at Westminster' (Interviewee 1, 2015). To put that otherwise in the language of this thesis, the people of Scotland elected to remain a part of the United Kingdom in order to keep the solidarity of the Union and the strength that this Union provides.

When discussing the impact the Scottish independence referendum had on devolution across the United Kingdom, it would be seriously amiss not to discuss the growing public unrest within England over a lack of a purely English parliament. The idea of an English parliament, or of English Votes for English Laws, has been toyed with as a way of creating greater equality after devolution (Jackson, 2016: 309). In discussions surrounding this, this is often envisaged as taking one of two forms. The first is that there would be a distinctive English parliament created to manage laws which effect England alone, with Westminster remaining as a national parliament for the whole of the United Kingdom (Watt *et al*, 2014). This plan would raise issues surrounding what this English only parliament would look like. Also, there are very few matters which influence England only (Falconer, 2006: 7). Were would it be geographically? The north and south of England are so different that they may as well be separate countries. Would there need to be more than one

English parliament for each region? The second of the two ideas is that Members of Parliament at Westminster would be distinguished so that only English MPs only could vote on English matters (Watt *et al*, 2014). *Ulster* Unionists have been consistently critical of this latter option because '….the fact is that whatever happens at Westminster umm should be to the good and to the advantage of everybody within the UK, it shouldn't just be for one country' (Interviewee 3, 2015). As argued by Interviewee 31 (2016), 'I can understand where English MPs are coming from. I'm not sure that the current way we deal with English Votes for English laws is the best way of dealing with it. But, again, that needs to be part of a wider conversation about how the UK and the nations of the UK work together in the future and how much autonomy each one of those nations has.'

Of the participants interviewed many were sympathetic to the aspirations of the English that they alone should have a say on the issues which affect them, although they did not think that Westminster is the place for this (Interviewee 9, 2015; Interviewee 18, 2015). As stated by Interviewee 2 (2015):

> 'I am sympathetic to Englishmen who, and Englishwomen … who feel that Scottish MPs can hold them to ransom, especially if it's done for cynical reasons…I think we have to tread very carefully. Every MP is the same. The PM to the lowliest backbencher, we are all equal. It's not about some being more equal than others, we are all equal. The PM just happens to be the first amongst the equals in that he is selected to be the PM and that we cannot do anything that changes the balance.'

From a Unionist viewpoint, Westminster is respected as bringing together people from all across the United Kingdom to discuss laws and policy for the betterment of the Union as a whole. To change the balance of this may be detrimental to members from the smaller regions such as Northern Ireland as they tend to benefit from the asymmetrical nature of the devolved settlements (Hazell, 2006: 53). As Interviewee 5 (2015) expressed this, 'I would be very concerned I think from a broader constitutional point of view if we move towards English votes for English laws in part because of the fact that ... England from a population base would

represent perhaps around 80 or 85% of the overall population … but I can understand it. There is a clear feeling of disparity.'

Interviewee 17 (2015) succinctly expressed their thoughts on English Votes for English Laws in the dramatic yet impactful statement, 'Oh I think that would be the death knell of the Union'. However, this is how Westminster now does order its business and the Union is still standing (Jackson, 2016). Other participants expressed concern that as England is the largest region of the United Kingdom that very little to no legislation truly only affects them and that any decisions they would make on an English only basis still filter down to have an impact on the other regions. According to Interviewee 8 (2015), 'I can see the reason why you would want English Votes for English People because clearly we have Scottish laws for Scottish people and we are a legislative assembly and we can have Northern Irish laws … so it is difficult to disagree with it, but at the same time English laws can obviously be amended in ways that affect us.' For Gover and Kenny (2016: 37-38) even the term 'English Votes for English Laws' is divisive and that it should be changed to 'English Consent to English Laws' to prevent it from being seen as negative towards the other component nations of the United Kingdom. Therefore how will the United Kingdom address this problem? As Interviewee 25 (2016) said, 'Look, we need a settlement to all of this and I don't know what it is. Is it a completely federal UK? Is it an English parliament? Is it English Votes for English Laws? I don't know what the answer to that is'. The question of what is the United Kingdom for in the twenty-first century is extremely important post-devolution (Jeffery and Wincott, 2006: 10). The ties which bind the Union together now need to be strengthened. With identity becoming so fragmented across the Union as regional identities become more popular than Britishness, it may be that strengthening shared rule rather than self-rule alone will be the key to the survival of the Union, reconciling allegiance and identity, contract and solidarity and instrumentalism and non-instrumentalism (Aughey, 2009: 9). The question of how to settle the constitutional question of the United Kingdom is difficult to answer,

yet it is a suggestion of this thesis that the theoretical framework of elective affinity can at least provide an imaginative grounding of how this can be achieved.

The elective components which bind the regions of the United Kingdom together are there. The Acts of Union are still in place. Each region still takes part in elections to a national parliament and has political representation at this national level. Equally three of the four regions of the United Kingdom have their own devolved institutions and have a level of political autonomy to themselves. Devolution itself is not a threat to the Union so long as the connections at the national level are maintained and to do this one also needs to take into account the affinity aspect of the United Kingdom. The elective ties themselves are not enough. To secure a union state and to ensure that it continues one needs a shared sense of affinity and belonging to exist between the regions. This social union needs to be strengthened across the United Kingdom in order to move the current argument from that of 'self rule' *alone* to 'shared rule' within the Union (Elazar, 1987).

6.4: Instrumental and non-instrumental Union?

From the view point of Unionists in Northern Ireland the decision of the Scottish people to remain within the Union was a victory (in the language of this thesis) for elective affinity. Even though a continuation of the social and economic unions was promised by the Scottish Nationalist Party for an independent Scotland the best method of safeguarding these was to vote to remain within the Union. The instrumental connections are important. They are the tangible benefits that exist as a result of the Union. Yet even when discussing these there is a non-instrumental element which cannot be ignored. As discussed within Chapter Two, instrumental and non-instrumental components of the United Kingdom cannot be separated as the two are mutually inclusive as argued above in relation to the political and social unions. Thus the single currency of the pound sterling may be a primarily instrumental aspect of the United Kingdom, but it is also a part of the

identity of the United Kingdom and therefore of Scotland. Former Prime Minister David Cameron said in his speech after the result was announced, 'Scotland voted for a stronger Scottish Parliament backed by the strength and security of the United Kingdom and I want to congratulate the No campaign for that – for showing people that our nations really are better together' (2014). Although a narrow victory, the result of the Scottish independence referendum remains a victory. As stated by Interviewee 21 (2015), 'I want to see them [Scotland] staying in the Union. Now whenever I walk through Westminster and you walk in to the central lobby and you look up above you and you have four flags. You have the English, the Welsh, the Scottish and the Northern Irish. The four regions come together as one in that place and that's the way I want it to stay.' Political representation, as discussed within Chapter Two, does seek to reconcile the regional within the national. Whilst devolution may allow Scotland and the other devolved regions to have a certain level of regional autonomy over their own political affairs, the fact that they then also send political representatives to the national parliament at Westminster ensures that a tie to the United Kingdom is secure.

This sentiment was also expressed in Interviewee 8's comment that '…I want to see all four nations staying together because that's what keeps us together that what our strength is. I think Scotland would be too small to go it alone. I think we need the strength of that United Kingdom' (2015). This statement is interesting in that it fits into the theme of contract and solidarity. In one sense, the participant is arguing that Scotland cannot survive itself and for that reason it should continue to keep the contracts it has with the United Kingdom as the larger union state is stronger together than it is in its individual component parts. On the other hand this idea of safety in numbers for the regions of the United Kingdom also promotes a sense of solidarity between the regions, a sense that together they can accomplish more than they ever could apart. Whatever way the tide of Scottish (and Irish) nationalism turns it remains clear that the issues raised by the Scottish independence referendum are not finished yet. For now, Scotland has elected to remain a part of the United Kingdom. There are instrumental reasons for this

decision based upon contractual obligations and political allegiances, but there are also the non-instrumental reasons of identity and solidarity which can only be explained through a shared sense of affinity existing across the United Kingdom. Chapter Four argues that the paradoxes of Ulster Britishness can be described using the theory of elective affinity. This is also the case of explaining how Scotland voted to remain within the Union.

6.5: Conclusion

The question of how Scottish independence or a more autonomous form of devolution will affect Northern Ireland has been open to much debate. Commentators such as Maxwell (2012) believe that:

> 'it seems unlikely that the break-up of the Anglo-Scottish Union would bring Sinn Fein's dream of a united Ireland any closer to realisation … The most recent Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey, an authoritative account of political attitudes in the north, shows that 73 per cent of the Ulster electorate as a whole wants to remain part of the UK, with 52 per cent of Catholic voters content to maintain the union with Britain. (The figure for Protestants is 96 per cent.)'.

Some Unionist politicians such as Lord Empey have argued that the current Scottish situation has the ability to reignite difficulties which have been dormant in Northern Irish society in recent years, 'I don't wish to exaggerate, but if the Scottish nationalists were to succeed it could possibly reignite the difficulties we have just managed to overcome' (cited Maxwell, 2012).

Much of the concern of the Unionists interviewed for this thesis is focused on the perception that it is now Scotland and not Northern Ireland which is the most unstable and volatile region of the United Kingdom. Interviewee 2 (2015) 'I remember at the time thinking "*It's amazing what difference 10 years makes*", where 10-15 years ago Northern Ireland was the most unstable part of the Union. Today Scotland is the most unstable part of the Union and Northern Ireland's probably one of the more stable parts'. The overwhelming sentiment that emerged

from the question on the Scottish independence campaign was the feeling of unease that is still felt by Unionist politicians in relation to this. The continued strength of the Nationalist movement in Scotland even after the outcome of the referendum still plays on the mind of Unionists, 'So it's a worrying situation that there's still a campaign there, I hope if there is another referendum that folk will again see sense … But I am worried that Nicola Sturgeon is saying she's going to be coming back for another bite of the cherry' (Interviewee 13, 2015). As Interviewee 26 replied (2016), 'I would be very sad and very disappointed if Scotland didn't remain within the United Kingdom.' As observed above, to ensure that Scotland continues to elect to remain as a part of the United Kingdom the social aspects of the Union must be strengthened to ensure that Scotland continues to feel as though it belongs within this union state.

For the participants of this research, the Scottish independence referendum was defined by a series of paradoxes, these being: anxiety and reassurance, self-rule and shared rule, and Instrumentalism and non-instrumentalism. As discussed above, *Ulster* unionists within Northern Ireland experienced each of these concepts during the 2014 referendum. They were anxious about the referendum, but were reassured by the decision of the Scottish electorate to remain within the United Kingdom. However, the 2016 European referendum once again raised the spectre of Scottish independence, resulting in a continued presence of anxiety surrounding this topic. The participants, being Unionists, are advocators of the shared rule of the United Kingdom, but they are also supporters of the right of each region of the United Kingdom to have its own devolved institutions. The concern surrounding this would be the potential risk that English and Scottish nationalism, rather than Irish Nationalism, may have over the future of the Union. The referendum also provided an opportunity to discuss the instrumental and non-instrumental components of the United Kingdom and using the Scottish independence referendum as a case study, this thesis argues that elective affinity exists within the United Kingdom. The Scottish electorate *elected* to remain within the United Kingdom, underling a shared sense of affinity between Scotland and the rest of the

United Kingdom that has resulted in the majority of the Scottish population feeling as though they belong within the Union.

Chapter Seven

Questions of European Union

7.1: Introduction

While Europe bears the same nomenclature of a union, it differs from the British Union in many obvious ways. First, it is a union of very distinctive sovereign states that came together through trade agreements and beneficial shared policies, or in other words, mainly for *instrumental* rather than for non-instrumental reasons. This relationship portrays a version of elective affinity yet to be discussed, that of an inverted elective affinity in which in the balance of relationships, contract takes priority over solidarity, diversity over unity, instrumental over non-instrumental, and self-rule over shared rule. The United Kingdom had a referendum in 1975 on continued membership of the then European Economic Community (Curtice, 2016: 209). Yet while the elective component exists, the European Union has never succeeded in securing deep affinities - or a sense of European identity - for the majority of British citizens (Hewstone, 1986; Cinnirella, 1997). Even though the Scottish Nationalist movement sought to leave the United Kingdom in 2014, when it came down to the actual vote the majority of the Scottish people chose to remain. This is the result of centuries of shared history and belonging that Scotland shares with the rest of the United Kingdom. However, the European Union never fully achieved this sense of affinity to complement its economic and political roles and as a result the United Kingdom voted to leave the European Union on the 26th June 2016 (Manson *et al*, 2016). This chapter addresses the questions of inverted elective affinity which have emerged during the European referendum and its aftermath and will discuss this within the frameworks of contract and solidarity, difference and unity and allegiance and identity which have been used to examine Unionism and Britishness throughout this thesis.

7.2: Contract not solidarity

If we are to examine the relationship between *Ulster* Unionists and the European Union through the framework of inverted elective affinity, it is important to discuss it as a contradiction an inversion of our understanding of elective affinity. Therefore, rather than the relationship being one of contract *and* solidarity, it becomes one of contract *without* solidarity and this distinction is key when observing the decision of the United Kingdom as a whole to leave the European Union. Elective affinity binds the United Kingdom together through a combination of constitutional and political contracts, whilst also creating a sense of belonging and solidarity through shared culture, history and identity. This is not the case for the European Union. It may have the contractual ties in place, but without a shared sense of European identity to reinforce these contracts they are fragile and this is why the majority of the United Kingdom voted to leave the European Union on the 23rd June 2017. With no deeply shared sense of belonging to bind the British electorate to Europe, they were able to look at the contractual relationship in purely instrumental terms and as a result decided that the negatives outweighed any benefits the United Kingdom received from the European Union. What then do *Ulster* Unionists think of the European referendum and do their views and opinions prove the existence of this inverted elective affinity? This will be discussed at length in this chapter.

The interviewees were asked to give their views on the European referendum. It is important to note that most of the interviews were conducted in 2015 before the date of the referendum had been decided. This is why the wording for this question originally refers to *if* and not *when*.

What do you believe will happen if there is an EU referendum?

The timing of the referendum may account for the high number of undecided responses from participants who were unwilling to give voice to whether they wished to leave or remain in the European Union. This section will provide a brief

summary of the opinions of participants surrounding the European referendum. Further analysis is provided in the following section.

Table 7.1: EU referendum voting inclination of participants

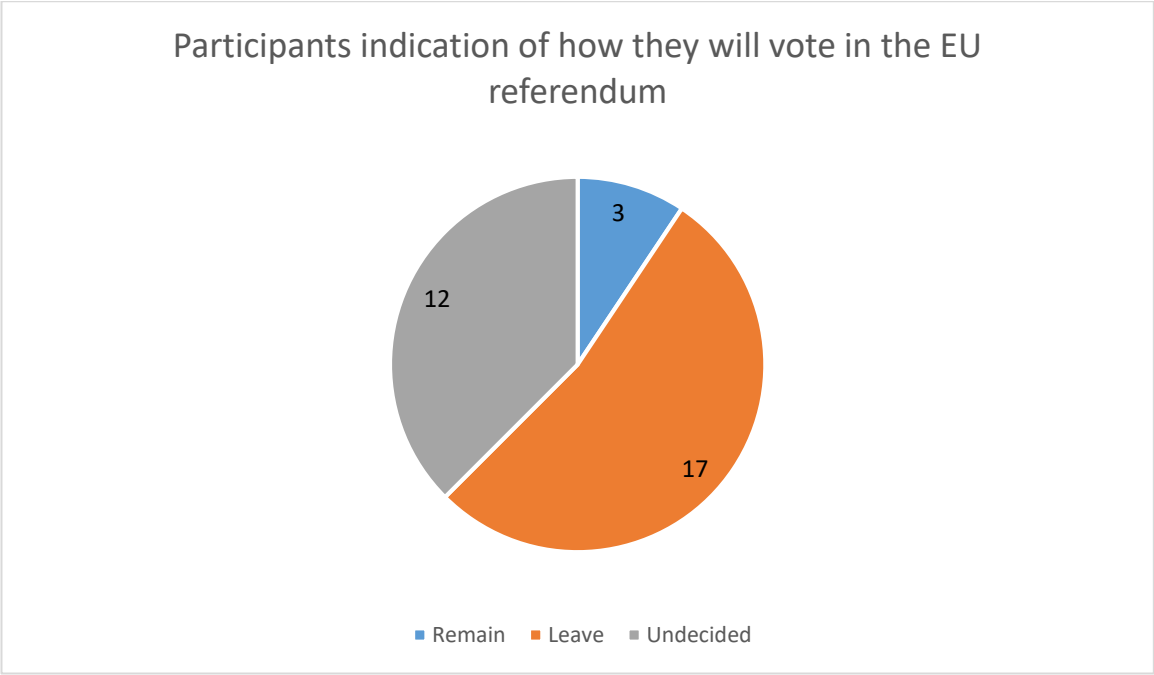
This table examines the view held by each participant on the European referendum.

Participant	Remain	Leave	Undecided
1		Yes	
2		Yes	
3			Yes
4			Yes
5		Yes	
6			Yes
7	*Interview cut short*		
8			Yes
9			Yes
10			
11			Yes
12		Yes	
13		Yes	
14			Yes
15			Yes
16	Yes		
17		Yes	
18		Yes	
19			Yes, but closer to remain
20		Yes	
21		Yes	
22		Yes	

23		Yes	
24		Yes	
25			Yes
26		Yes	
27			Yes
28			Yes
29		Yes	
30		Yes	
31		Yes	
32			No defined answer
33	Yes		
34	Yes		
35		Yes	

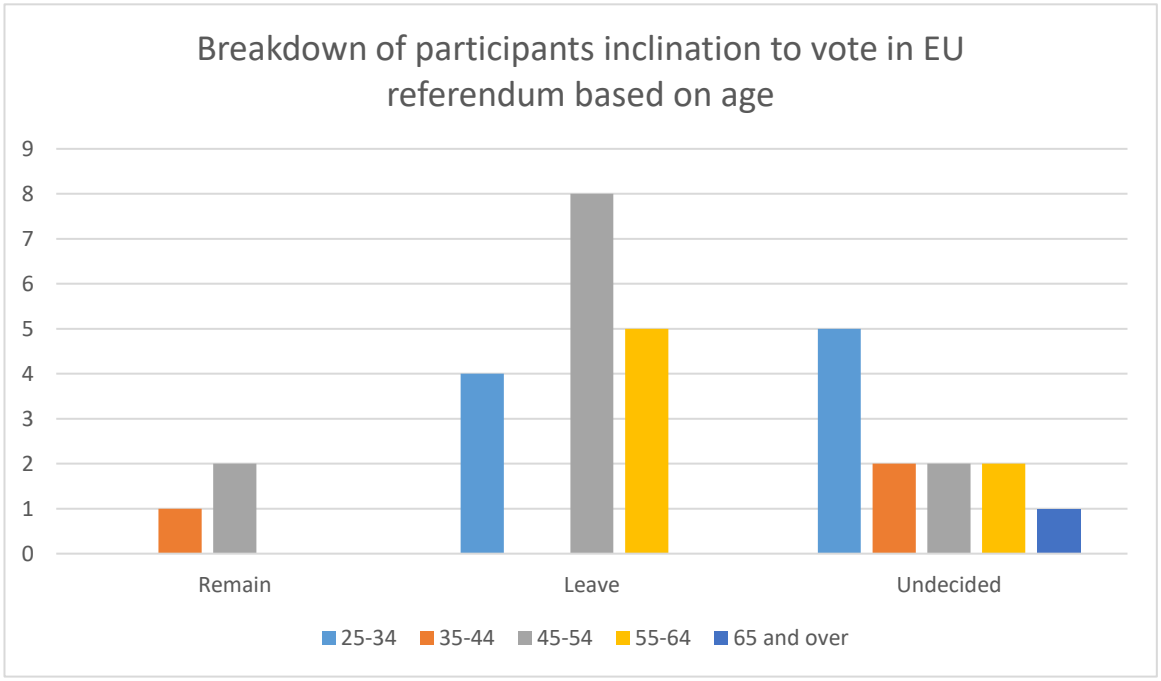
Fig.7.1: Participants indication of how they will vote in the EU referendum

This graph portrays the information from Table 7.1 in a visual manner in order to show more concisely the breakdown in opinions around this question.



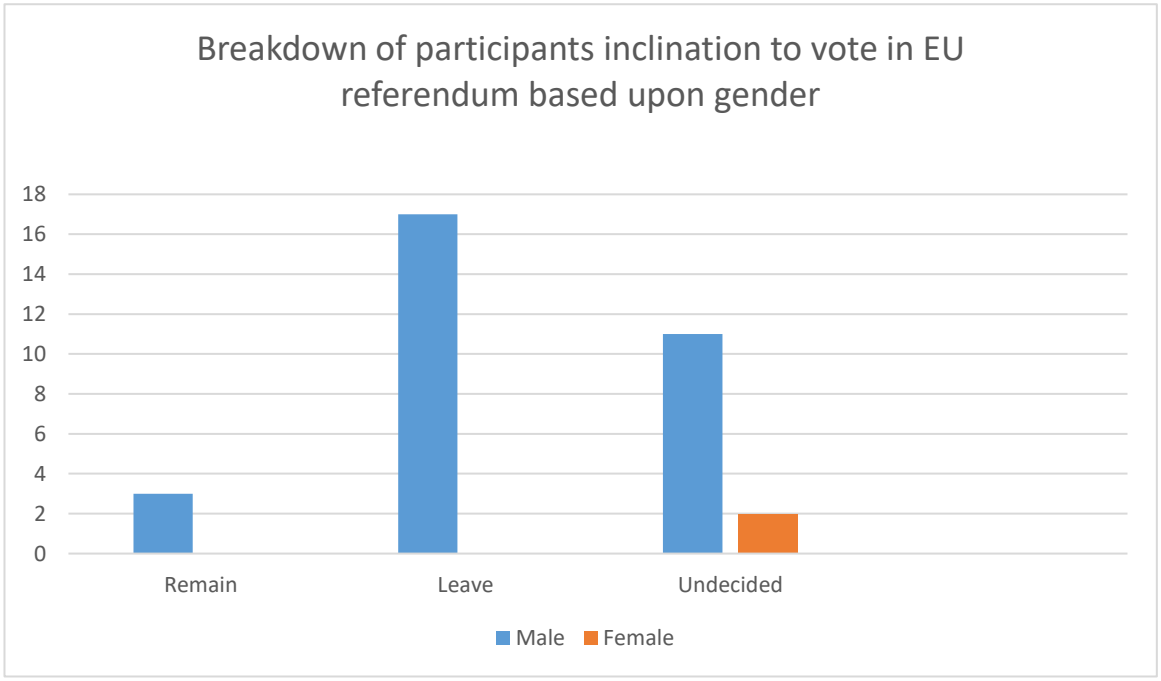
When examining age in relation to how participants viewed the European referendum, some interesting findings emerged. Although most of the interviews conducted for this thesis took place before the referendum was held, the break down as observed within Fig.7.1 manages to be a reasonably accurate portrayal of the overall Protestant/Unionist vote in Northern Ireland, which was spilt around 70% Leave to 30% Remain in opinion polls in the months leading up to the referendum (White, 2016). One participant to say outright that the United Kingdom should remain in Europe was within the 35-44 age category, with the other two Remainers being in the 45-54 category. More interesting is the observation that participants from the 45 to 64 age range were more likely to express the view that the United Kingdom should leave the European Union. One reason that might explain this is that these participants remember the first referendum on Europe and can remember a time when it was considered to be mainly an economic union with contractual benefits. Having watched the European Union develop into a more political and potentially federal association may have been the swaying factor for these individuals. On the reverse of that, participants from the 25-34 age category tended to be more cautious in regards to the European referendum and were largely undecided at the time of the interviews. One explanation for this is that having grown up with the European Union they have more of a sense of solidarity with it, having not experienced life in a United Kingdom that was not a part of the European Union.

Fig.7.2: Breakdown of participant's inclination to vote in EU referendum based on age



Due to the low number of female Unionist designated politicians who took part in this study, no actual generalisations can be made.

Fig. 7.3: Breakdown of participant's inclination to vote in EU referendum based on gender



As observed in Chapter Five, only three participants expressed that they had a European component to their identity (Interviewee 7, 2015; Interviewee 16, 2015; Interviewee 20, 2015). What is interesting about this is that all three of these participants only mentioned a European component due to the fact that they quoted John Hewitt in regards to their identity (see Chapter Five). One would assume that having a European component to their identity would mean that these participants would be more likely to want to remain within the European Union, yet this was not so clear cut. Unfortunately, the interview with Interviewee 7 was cut short due to circumstances that were outside of the control of either the participant or the researcher and due to this we do not know their stance on the European referendum. Interviewee 16 stated that they would vote to Remain within the European Union. This would make sense in regards to what we know about elective affinity. Interviewee 16 felt that they had an affinity to Europe and elected to remain within it, arguing that 'Now I would like as somebody who believes in the UK to be making the argument that the UK and Northern Ireland … is better in the European Union, you know' (2015). However, Interviewee 20 feels that they have a European component to their identity, but that they will still vote to leave the European Union. As Interviewee 20 explained, 'we don't ignore the benefits and there are some. Northern Ireland as a region has benefited more financially than any other … [but] if the referendum was tomorrow we would say thanks very much, it's been an interesting experiment, but love many, trust few, always paddle your own canoe and that's what we should do as a country' (2015). What this statement from Interviewee 20 highlights is that the affinity between the United Kingdom and the European Union and the benefits that it receives from its membership of this union is not strong enough to overlook the negative aspects of it. This is inverted elective affinity in action.

Not all of the participants were confident about the perceived benefits of leaving the European Union. This was not due to a feeling of solidarity with the European Union, but because of the contractual relationship and the benefits with the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland has received from it. Unionism, and in particular the

Ulster Unionist Party, has been going through a pragmatic change in attitudes towards their relationship with the European Union (Murphy, 2009: 590). Interviewee 11 (2015) expressed unease with the referendum over the impact it could have on the economic union in particular, stating that, 'I would be a little bit cautious over it and certainly we need to listen to the business community who would be very nervous about leaving the EU and the farming community as well who obviously benefit hugely from ah Europe.' The contractual aspects of the European Union have provided many benefits for the United Kingdom. Interviewee 4 (2015) raised the financially pragmatic point that:

> 'Europe is going to be there. It's a landmass which we have to deal with. So the question then is: how do we deal with it? What form or partnership does that take? Ah, when you look at some of the nations … outside of the EU they still have to pay money in trade deals. So are they getting a good deal being outside of Europe, but still have to pay money in trade deals?'

One of the key claims made by those supporting Leave - that the United Kingdom would have the capability to negotiate more lucrative trade deals and immigration policies outside of the European Union (Leave.eu, 2016: 2) – was met by this respondent at least with some scepticism. Worryingly for Unionists and those of the electorate who voted to Leave on the basis of immigration one of the possible clauses of a trade deal with the European Union may be to retain the freedom of movement which is currently in place (Rampen, 2016). It is also questionable just how much money the United Kingdom will actually save in this manner, and even greater questions have been raised over how the money that has been saved will be transferred back into the economy of the United Kingdom. When trying to understand why such a large proportion of participants unsure as to how they would vote in the referendum, one possible answer may be that the Remain campaign was viewed as weak and provided no real tangible information to the electorate in the weeks leading up to the referendum. Interviewee 16 (2015) expressed the view that there should have been an argument that 'the UK and Northern Ireland … is better in the European Union' yet this rhetoric was not often

heard during the campaign. The sense of confusion surrounding the European referendum was captured by Interviewee 27 (2016) in the statement:

> 'Oh my word … if you are voting with your heart you would vote out because you want to see Northern Ireland, the United Kingdom be the great country that it was and that it should be, you know, but at the same time we are part of Europe, umm, and we joined it for the trade agreements and the. You know, the free market. Umm, and so, if you are voting with your head, should we stay in? I think there is so much information that we actually really need. There is so much propaganda out there that you don't know what to believe either and so it is, it is very difficult.'

Interviewee 28 (2016) was also deeply troubled, arguing, 'I think there's, I think there is a lot of scaremongering going on from all sides, umm, and there is not enough clear facts there.' In regards to the larger focus of the thesis, this can be connected to the fear of belonging and the doubt component of *Ulster* Unionists identity. *Ulster* Unionists have no real affinity with Europe or a sense of belonging, but there are instrumental and contractual connections which cannot be overlooked. This is the inverted version of elective affinity noted in the introduction to this chapter. Here is a paradox difficult to reconcile and when put to the test, as it was in the European Union referendum, and when forced to choose most Unionists chose to vote Leave. This is why even an individual such as Interviewee 20 who expressed a European component to their identity would still rather leave the European Union than remain within it.

Without a sense of affinity and solidarity towards the European Union, participants focused on the contractual aspects of Europe. From the perspective of businesses, participants were concerned over whether leaving the European Union really was the best option. As outlined by Interviewee 15 (2015):

> 'Well, I'm not the most enthusiastic European Union supporter, but obviously there are advantages and disadvantages … Now it's going to be very difficult to leave Europe because there is a lot of businesses rely on a lot of the European trade…'

Does leaving the European Union then result in more opportunities for businesses? Is it the best decision contractually and instrumentally? There was a pragmatic approach to the relationship between money and the European Union that ran through the interview process, but as expressed by Interviewee 20 (2015), 'finance is crude. We can't focus on it alone and we need to look at the barriers, the pit falls.' Interviewee 9 (2015) took the view that if one were only to look at financial gain when making this decision that 'from that point of view we probably should stay' as during this time European funding is one of the only pots of money available for certain types of projects. Northern Ireland has often been heavily dependent on money from the European Union, most notably through the Peace Funding money which was available for infrastructure and for cross-community projects (O'Carroll and McDonald, 2016; Whysall, 2016: 2; EU debate NI, 2016: 9; House of Commons, 2016: 10; Leave the EU, 2016: 97). How the decision to leave the European Union will affect this funding is an area of concern for Northern Ireland as latest figures show that 'Northern Ireland [is] due to receive almost €3.4 billion over the current EU budget period 2014-2020, with additional funds expected from centrally managed EU programmes' (Ulster Unionist Party, 2016: 5). From a contractual viewpoint one may argue that it would have been more beneficial for Northern Ireland to remain within the European Union, yet without a sense of solidarity to support the contractual arrangements they were not strong enough to endure.

The issue of trade was brought up as a main reason why the Unionist politicians who were interviewed wished to leave the European Union. The idea that the United Kingdom gives more money to the European Union than it receives back was prevalent throughout the interviews and within wider Unionism.

> 'As a country we are pouring, you know, twice as much into the European Union as we ever get out of it, umm, and are we seeing net benefits which would offset that? I actually don't believe we are' (Interviewee 17, 2015).

The relationship between the European Union and the United Kingdom is portrayed as one that is overwhelmingly contractual with very little solidarity to underpin it.

Ulster Unionists, as discussed within previous chapters, feel solidarity with the United Kingdom, but this has never been the case with the European Union. For some participants there was a perception that 'we burnt too many bridges in joining the EU', something that could be rectified by leaving the European Union and being in a position to negotiate a better, separate trade deal, one which would benefit the United Kingdom far more than had previously done (Interviewee 1, 2015). For example, more trading partnerships could be created with nations such as the United States of America (Oliver and Williams, 2016). Being a member of the European Union was seen as restrictive when it came to forging trade deals with other parts of the world. Interviewee 31 (2016) provided a concise outline of this feeling in the statement:

> 'Our economy is doing well, but we are constrained by the fact that our EU membership means we can't negotiate trade agreements with big countries like China, India, the United States, even our Commonwealth partners like Canada and Australia, we can't negotiate bi-lateral trade agreements. So I actually think that being outside of the European Union now, but having a strong relationship with the EU, gives us the freedom to negotiate trade agreements to the benefit of the UK economy.'

To provide the United Kingdom, and as a direct result Northern Ireland, with the best options for increasing trade deals many felt leaving the European Union was necessary to allow the United Kingdom to have full access to these markets (Interviewee 6, 2015). As the world continues to get smaller due to increased travel, ease of moving goods and globalisation, it is necessary for the United Kingdom to compete in global markets, something it has found difficult to do within the confines of the European Union (Interviewee 22, 2015). Some participants felt the European Union was fine when it was purely an economic union, but the increased bureaucracy greatly outweighs the benefits the United Kingdom receives from these trade deals (Interviewee 6, 2015). What is interesting about these findings is that the responses provided by participants are not specific to Northern Ireland. Instead, they are very much of a 'British' response. What this shows is that the sense of shared affinity which exists between Great Britain and *Ulster* Unionists in regards to opinions surrounding the European Union. Elective affinity may be inverted in regards to the European Union, but this is not the case for the United

Kingdom (see Chapter Four, section 4.3). The United Kingdom as a whole voted to leave the European Union by 51.9% to 48.1% (BBC News, 2016b). Whilst Northern Ireland voted as a whole to remain within the European Union at 55.8% of the vote, Unionists were overwhelmingly shown to be voting to leave in pre-referendum polls in keeping with the majority decision of the whole of the United Kingdom (White, 2016). For Arlene Foster, the leader of the Democratic Unionist Party, this decision meant that 'We are now entering a new era of an even stronger United Kingdom' (BBC News, 2016b).

The European referendum has been and gone, but the impact on the United Kingdom is only just beginning. Now the decision has been made that the United Kingdom is leaving the European Union and Article 50 has been triggered, the key question which remains is: How will this affect the United Kingdom in the future and Northern Ireland's place within it? It may be that the only way for the United Kingdom to succeed is to focus on making this transition as smooth and as beneficial for all the regions of the Union as possible. How this will be managed is difficult as even within the Unionist community in Northern Ireland, a section of the United Kingdom well known for being distinctively Eurosceptic, there is still uncertainty over Brexit and its implications. As outlined by Interviewee 4 (2015):

> 'There's so many unanswered questions. What does Europe look like in the future whether we're in it or not? What does the UK look like if we're in it or not? What does the relationship look like if we're in it or not? Those are all questions that I can't answer. So how can I who has got the finger on the pulse, who eats and breathes and sleeps this stuff, if I don't know those questions answers how can I go into a polling booth and make a decision on a referendum? How can ordinary people that don't really know about Europe and what it does and what it doesn't do and how it regulates and how it doesn't and the burden on it and the regulations, how do they make an informed decision? And that, the whole thing worries me?'

The result of the European referendum of the 23rd June 2016, then, has the potential to become one of the biggest risks and destabilizing factors for Unionism. Though Article 50 was triggered on the 29th March 2017 it remains (at the time of writing) unclear about what sort of deal the United Kingdom can reach with the EU

27 and how this will affect Northern Ireland's border with the Republic of Ireland (Hughes and Midgley, 2017; House of Lords, 2016: 5). Thus, for Northern Ireland in particular, Brexit raises serious territorial, constitutional and financial questions which do not affect any other region of the United Kingdom. The situation surrounding the border with the Republic of Ireland has not been sufficiently addressed, even though politicians on both sides of the border - as well as the British Government and the EU Commission - have made public commitments to do their best to avoid a 'hard border' (Campbell, 2017). At the time of writing, there is currently an ongoing issue in regards to these negotiations, with European Union officials stating that trade talks between the United Kingdom and the European Union cannot take place until a border agreement has been reach, whilst British politicians argue that 'a final decision on the Northern Irish border cannot be made until a UK-EU trade deal has been agreed' (Elgot *et a*l, 2017). These concepts of diversity and unity within the United Kingdom following the European referendum will be discussed within the next section.

7.3: Difference not Unity

So far this thesis has discussed unity-in-diversity as an element in elective affinity within the United Kingdom. However, in the case of *Ulster* Unionists and the European Union this changes to difference *not* unity. This argument is that difference cannot be reconciled in 'inverted' elective affinity such that the very thin sense of allegiance to the structures and objectives of the EU was always fragile and conditional. This difference is not just in relation to the United Kingdom and the European Union. Another difference which is vital to this thesis is the perception that *Ulster* Unionists do not think positively of European Union unity and only observe the differences which exist between the United Kingdom and the European Union.

From a cursory glance, one may wonder why this referendum had such an impact on the Union as the United Kingdom as a whole would be either in or out of it as a result. The issue came from the breakdown of the vote. Overall, the United Kingdom voted to leave by a narrow margin of 51.9% to 48.1% with an overall voter turnout rate of 72.2% (The Electoral Commission, 2016). The voting pattern across the four regions varied. England and Wales both voted to leave by 53.4% and 52.5% respectively, but Northern Ireland and Scotland voted to remain by 55.8% and 62% respectively (BBC News, 2016b). In light of this Scotland began to call for a second independence referendum, a mere two years after the first. Gone was the idea that the 2014 Scottish independence referendum would put that debate to rest for a generation. Northern Ireland is also unsure of its position within the post-Brexit United Kingdom. It is the only region of the United Kingdom to share a land border with a European Union member state, the Republic of Ireland. Would this result lead to the creation of a hard border between the two countries? How would this affect the movement of people? Could this also lead to increased support for a United Ireland to ensure Northern Ireland remains a member of the European Union? All these questions remain unanswered, with little or no indication of answers being provided satisfactorily any time soon.

For Unionists in Northern Ireland, this is a particularly worrying development. Whilst British sovereignty free from the confines of the European Union is at the foremost of most Unionists desires for the United Kingdom, was this bought at too high a price? The potential consequence that this could lead to the break-up of the Union is an issue which was not often discussed in detail in the weeks leading up to the referendum, an accurate representation perhaps of the old adage, *'Out of sight, out of mind'.* However, it is necessary to note that this was not viewed as a potential consequence by the Democratic Unionist Party who actively campaigned for the United Kingdom to leave the European Union (Belfast Telegraph, 2016a; Foster, 2016). Between the Democratic Unionist Party and the Ulster Unionist Party there have been large differences over what a vote to leave in the European referendum would mean for the border. The Democratic Unionist Party

campaigned for Leave in the run up to the referendum, while the Ulster Unionist Party erred on the side of caution, but they still support the decision of the United Kingdom as a whole to leave the European Union after the referendum result was known (Gormley-Heenan and Aughey, 2017: 503; Ulster Unionist Party, 2016). This difference in attitudes is also apparent when one observes how party voters reacted to this referendum. A 2016 study by Garry and Coakley found that 70% of Democratic Unionist Party voters and 54% of Ulster Unionist Party voters voted to leave the European Union (Fealty, 2016). For some Unionists in Northern Ireland the risk this referendum brought to the unity of the Union was at the foremost of their thoughts before the referendum. The 2014 Scottish independence referendum was still in the memory of many, as well as more recent statements by the Scottish First Minster Nicola Sturgeon that Scotland would call another independence referendum if the United Kingdom voted to leave the European Union. For Interviewee 15 (2015), this was something that needed to be considered before the referendum was held:

> 'Yeah, well Scotland have clearly said if that happens they'll go for another referendum vote and want to remain in Europe. It's a big issue and … you know it could raise all sorts of questions around the Union.'

Leaving the European Union was a massive decision and one that must be managed delicately so that it does not have the consequence of further weakening the United Kingdom.

The difference that has emerged between the voting of the nations of the United Kingdom over the European referendum must be taken into account during the leaving process so that the United Kingdom can move forward as a single unit and not fragmented. As Interviewee 2 (2015) colourfully described this situation:

> 'we're fighting not only the full frontal battle on Europe and our relationship with Europe, but also fighting a backwards retreat movement on our relationship with Scotland … that's going to be dramatic and maybe traumatic.'

This has the potential to create division within the Union unless the unease of the electorate of Northern Ireland and Scotland who wished to remain within the European Union are addressed and calmed. Interviewee 13 expressed concern over this in 2015:

> 'If the referendum on Europe votes to leave, but the constituent parts Scotland and Wales want to stay, I think that could be a really difficult constitutional issue because [of] the move for independence in Scotland and they could easily vote to stay … they would demand independence within the EU and then you would have a situation of Scotland remaining in the European Union and England not.'

It can be argued that very little heed was taken of the Scottish dimension before the referendum and it is only now in the aftermath that it has been realised as a potentially destabilising factor. Questions surrounding consent also need to be delicately addressed within the Union in relation to Brexit. The United Kingdom as a whole may have voted to Leave the European Union, but Northern Ireland and Scotland both voted to Remain. One way to minimise any potential damage is to ensure that the voices of the people of Northern Ireland are heard during discussions on the future of the United Kingdom post-Brexit and that they are allowed to influence the political agenda surrounding this (Davis cited House of Commons, 2016). One thing is for certain and that is that Brexit 'holds issues for the Union in the longer term' in regards to managing difference and promoting unity and that it will continue to be an issue within the United Kingdom for the foreseeable future as it continues the process of leaving the European Union (Interviewee 12, 2015).

The situation surrounding Brexit in Northern Ireland is one that will take careful management to ensure the best deal is achieved for the people of this region. Even though the majority of the Northern Irish electorate voted to Remain within the European Union, the Democratic Unionist Party, the largest Unionist party in Northern Ireland, campaigned for the Leave campaign. This is in part due to the Eurosceptic nature of Unionism in Northern Ireland (Minto *et al*, 2016: 180; Peatling, 2001: 375). As this referendum was held after the 2016 Assembly Election

in which the Democratic Unionist Party won 38 out of the 108 seats available (resulting in it retaining its position as the largest party in Northern Ireland), this was seen by many to give the party a larger platform to campaign on. As explained by Interviewee 31 (2016):

> '…the DUP was the only main party that campaigned for leave and to achieve 44% of the vote in Northern Ireland is no mean achievement in my opinion. And so the DUP was very pleased with the outcome of the referendum because not only did we, umm, increase support significantly in Northern Ireland for the leave option, we also saw an overall majority in the UK. So the DUP supports the decision of the British people to leave the European Union.'

For many of the participants interviewed the issue of sovereignty came first and foremost in any conversation about the European referendum.

> 'Like a lot of Unionists I would have some concerns over the, ah, federalisation of Europe and indeed as someone who sees themselves as very pro-British as wanting to maintain the sovereignty of the UK' (Interviewee 5, 2015).

How issues of national sovereignty within the United Kingdom are influenced by the European Union has long been an area of concern for Unionists in Northern Ireland (Meehan, 2000: 87). Sovereignty can unite a country, but a lack of it can lead to fragmentation. For some, the high level of European Union bureaucracy that is being forced upon the United Kingdom is the main reason why Brexit needed to happen. Interviewee 13 (2015) argued that, 'I really do get annoyed when Europe tries to force its values upon a liberal democracy such as the United Kingdom' and Interviewee 26 (2016) stated that:

> 'The bureaucracy of the European Union is absolutely scandalous … the sooner we close Strasburg and actually put the real power at the centre of our devolved administrations and our national parliament I think it would be better for everybody'.

For others the large scale of the European Union and the level of power held by it was an area of concern that could not be over looked and that smaller sovereign units were much more representative of the people they served (Interviewee 11,

2015). This is an interesting point to raise as leaving the European Union has the possibility to increase the power of all government institutions in Northern Ireland (Gallagher, 2016: 2). In the words of Interviewee 24 (2015):

> 'I think there is a lot to be said for smaller units. Trying to balance together or hold together a lot of different countries in that sort of union doesn't work. And I think the United Kingdom is just about the right size.'

These narratives fit into the wider theoretical framework of the thesis through the concept of inverted elective affinity. This idea is when elective affinity is flipped on its head. Unlike the elective affinity mentioned previously within this thesis that can be used to reconcile issues of allegiance and identity, this variation contains contradictions which cannot be democratically reconciled. Whilst the relationship between the regions of the United Kingdom are bound by both allegiance and identity this allows the Union to stay together even in the most difficult of times this cannot be said for the relationship between the United Kingdom and the European Union. Rather, this relationship is purely one of contractual and instrumental connections with no deeply shared sense of identity, solidarity or affinity. Without cultural and historical affinities of the sort developed under sovereign states to provide a stable underpinning for the constitutional and economic unions, there is little to prevent this grouping from separating, as has been the case with the United Kingdom and the European Union. Daniel Innerarity has stated that for the European Union to work without this sense of demos it would have to 'replace belonging with identification', highlighting the inverted elective affinity which is present within this union (2014: 26). Rather than having an ingrained sense of belonging to the European Union, individuals within it would instead have to choose to identify with a European identity through elective means.

One of the largest issues regarding sovereignty relates to the nature of the laws and policies implemented in the United Kingdom at the request of the European Union.

For many of the participants, the policy making aspect of the European Union had become little more than a joke with Interviewee 3 (2015) expressing this as:

> '… whenever I look at stupid things … that Europe has done I find myself taking a very right wing view on it. I mean, let's just get out of here! It's damaged beyond repair, let's just get out.'

Interviewee 12 (2015) also expressed a similar sentiment in the comment:

> 'I think we'd be better off out of Europe, and I think that Europe has impinged on our national sovereignty in ways which are unacceptable. So many EU directives now can have, supersede anything which we can do in parliament and it will be one which again I think has the potential to weaken the Union because the Scottish nationalists have said they're pro-Europe and if Britain votes to leave Europe then that gives them another reason not to feel British and not to want to go along the direction which Britain is going in. So it holds big, I think it holds issues for the Union in the longer term. I still think we're better off out and I'm still voting for better off out.'

The feeling of frustration which comes from being an elected representative, but not having any tangible autonomy over policy creation and law making was a strong recurrent theme during the interview process (Interviewee 20, 2015; and Interviewee 21, 2015; Bulmer *et al*, 2006: 77). The control of the European Union over Westminster led to a feeling of disconnect between the component nations of the United Kingdom, an issue that does little to promote feelings of political solidarity and unity across the Union. Interviewee 29 (2016) best outlines this feeling of powerlessness which resulted from this lack of sovereignty in the statement:

> '…I can't answer as to what the overall picture will be, but certainly the majority of people I have been speaking to would be of an opinion to leave and the basis that you know, they feel that too many of our laws and regulations are being set by Europe and that we want to have more control over those. Ah, in terms of immigration and our borders we need more control. It's not about shutting the UK down and closing everything, it's about, you know, more tight in terms of regulation, umm, and of course the issue as well of how much we put into Europe and the debate around, you know, are we getting value for money back and how do we control our expenditure better and we feel that's best done by our own UK government.'

For *Ulster* Unionists the concept of difference not unity is that of the differences between the United Kingdom and the European Union and the fact that these differences cannot be reconciled due to the nature of inverted elective affinity. The issue now is that since the European referendum it has become more about the differences within the unity of the United Kingdom. When observing questions of unity and diversity within the United Kingdom and how these have been affected by the European referendum and its aftermath, the threat Scottish Nationalism poses post-European referendum cannot be underestimated. It is important to consider the Scottish element to these debates in that Scotland voted to remain within the European Union and that this has reignited calls for a second independence campaign. Interestingly, the result of the referendum was almost perfectly predicted by Interviewee 25 (2016) before the referendum, stating:

> 'What will be the effect on the Union? It will depend on the results within the Union. If England votes no and the UK as a whole votes no, but Northern Ireland and Scotland and Wales votes yes then that's obviously one country and the verdict of the people, but within that that can have a destabilising effect. If nothing else it will give Nicola Sturgeon and the SNP a reason to go back and say this is why we need another referendum'.

One certainty is that nothing surrounding this is certain, 'You can only ever tell when it happens and by then it's too late' (Interviewee 9, 2015). As discussed in Chapter Six, the ties which bind the Union are strained, but they are not quite broken yet. For the Unionists interviewed, the European Union is seen as an alter-ego (Jekyll to Hyde) of the United Kingdom which inverts the concepts of allegiance and identity, contract and solidarity and unity and belonging that have been previously discussed within the thesis.

7.4: Neither Identity nor Allegiance

Identity, as discussed in previous chapters, is one of the pillars that holds the United Kingdom together. Allegiance is another. Whilst both of these concepts can form political linkages on their own, they are inherently weak without both aspects to strengthen and complement each other (see Chapter Two). This is one of the areas

in which the idea of inverted elective affinity can best be observed in relation to the European Union and the United Kingdom. The electorate of the United Kingdom may have voted to stay in the European Economic Community in 1975 and have been connected to Europe through many contractual and instrumental policies and agreements, but the European Union has never succeeded in substantially creating a supranational identity sufficiently strong to shift the primary allegiance of British citizens as a whole (Hayward, 2006: 910). Even with an overarching European identification (rather than identity) the United Kingdom generally felt as though it was a place apart within this union, a symbolic scenario similar in many ways to Northern Ireland's place within the United Kingdom (Carl, 2003: 478; Hepburn and McLoughlin, 2011: 386). The United Kingdom, although part of Europe, is not connected to the landmass as it is separated by the English Channel. This physical separation enhances the distinctions between the British and European identities. A consequence of this lack of shared identity, allegiance, affinity and sense of belonging within the United Kingdom towards the European Union is in part the reason why the electorate of the United Kingdom as a whole voted to leave. Research by John Garry in 2016 found that 'Sixty-three percent of British identifiers [in Northern Ireland] voted to leave', highlighting a shared affinity with the majority of the United Kingdom in regards to the referendum. So far the focus has been on the contractual and instrumental aspects of the relationship between the European Union and the United Kingdom. This section will shift the focus onto the questions surrounding identity as raised by both the European referendum and the implementation of the decision to leave the European Union.

For Great Britain, leaving the European Union has little impact on its physical borders and only becomes a problem when borders are discussed in terms of immigration, freedom of movement or trade agreements (Springford, 2014). This cannot be said for Northern Ireland, the one part of the United Kingdom where questions of borders post-Brexit will affect the day to day lives of individuals, as well as in regards to trade, immigration and freedom of movement (Tonge, 2017: 1; Tonge, 2016: 3; Leaving the EU, 2016: 103-104). Northern Ireland is the only part of the United Kingdom that shares a land border with another European Union

member state, the Republic of Ireland. This complicates Northern Ireland's position in leaving the European Union as serious consideration must be given to how the border will look once Brexit is implemented. Will it continue to be a soft border like how it is now? This scenario, although preferable to many, would not be without its own difficulties as it would be extremely difficult to manage cross-border trade and movement of people this way. The alternative however would be to have a hard border between the two countries, an unwanted scenario that would effectively divide the island of Ireland even further (Chilchott cited Roche, 2016; House of Commons, 2016: 87). No matter what decision on the border is made it will still impact on the relationship between the two neighbouring countries. One literary example of the situation Northern Ireland now finds itself in can be interpreted within the poem *Mending Wall*, by Robert Frost.

'He only says, "Good fences make good neighbors."
Spring is the mischief in me, and I wonder
If I could put a notion in his head:
'Why do they make good neighbors? Isn't it
Where there are cows? But here there are no cows.
Before I built a wall I'd ask to know
What I was walling in or walling out,
And to whom I was like to give offense.
Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
That wants it down.'
(Abstract from 'Mending Wall' by Robert Frost)

The protagonist of Frost's famous poem was greatly concerned with why the wall was necessary, a thought recurrent during the course of the poem. In contrast, one of the most startling observations during the interview process was that hardly any of the participants openly discussed the issue of the Republic of Ireland and borders when talking about the effects of Brexit. Only one participant, Interviewee 18 (2015) felt this would be a major issue for the Northern Irish electorate. This is an intriguing observation, given that since the referendum vote on the 23rd June 2016 the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland has become a major political issue for the British government and one that has the potential to complicate the United Kingdom's decision to leave the European Union (Elgot *et al*,

2017; Beesley, 2017). This has been a significant finding within this chapter. Given the high media profile that is currently being enjoyed by the border question, it seems almost incredulous that only one participant has mentioned the border as an issue of concern. However, this can be explained by the timings of the interviews. The majority of the interviews conducted for this thesis were undertaken in 2015 and early 2016, before the European referendum was held. Due to this, many of the participants had not yet given serious consideration to the practical difficulties that would arise from the United Kingdom deciding to leave the European Union. Gormley-Heenan and Aughey (2017), have outlined three aspects to the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland which need to be addressed post-Brexit. These are: 'what' the border is (either a hard border or a soft border), 'where' the border is (on the island or in the Irish Sea) and most importantly, 'the border in the mind' (Gormley-Heenan and Aughey, 2017: 498). This concept of 'the border in the mind' refers to the history of the border in Ireland and the connotations which this has on the political situation in Northern Ireland (Gormley-Heenan and Aughey, 2017: 500-501). This is unique to Northern Ireland as no other part of the United Kingdom has this direct consequence of Brexit.

According to Interviewee 18 (2015):

> '…Northern Ireland will probably have more of an acute interest given that we share a land border with a European member state in the Republic of Ireland … I think will have a focusing of minds for people in Northern Ireland...'

This is a potential reason why the Northern Irish electorate as a whole voted to remain within the European Union (BBC News, 2016b). For the people of Scotland this decision was based on a sense of affinity to the European Union not experienced elsewhere within the United Kingdom (Carl, 2003: 480-481; Minto *et al*, 2016: 180). For Northern Ireland, and in particular Nationalists, this decision was also based on affinity, but of affinity towards the Republic of Ireland as much as, and probably more, than towards Europe. Going into the European referendum there were many unknowns: How is this border going to be effected by Brexit?

Will this result in the creation of a hard border with customs which will affect individuals on both sides of the border? The actual physical implications of having a hard or soft land border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland is an important conversation which has to date complicated simple Unionist narratives about Brexit.

At the time of writing there is current controversy surrounding the border issue. On the 4th December 2017 a proposal for a deal between the Conservative government and the Irish government regarding the border was publically rejected by the Democratic Unionist Party (Stone, 2017). This deal would have seen Northern Ireland leave the European Union on separate terms from Great Britain. The issue of 'regulatory alignment' and what this could mean for Northern Ireland is of core concern to Unionists. For the Democratic Unionist Party, any deal such as this would be unwanted as it would further distance Northern Ireland from the rest of the United Kingdom and fails to take into account their views surrounding the Brexit process (Polley, 2017). To give Northern Ireland a different deal post-Brexit than Great Britain would be to once again ignite questions over the identities of Unionists from Northern Ireland: are they British yet do not act like it, or are they truly Irish but do not know it (see Chapter Three, section 3.3). This may also have serious long term consciences for Theresa May as her minority Conservative government is dependent upon the support of the Democratic Unionist Party in key votes (Bush, 2017b). The concept of 'regulatory alignment' also raises concerns in other regions of the United Kingdom, with Scottish First Minister Nicola Sturgeon arguing that Scotland should also be allowed to retain a relationship with the European Union post-Brexit (Birnie, 2017; Parker *et al*, 2017).

The fact only one participant during the fieldwork stage of this thesis mentioned the issue of a border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland is itself an extremely important finding. But what does this mean? On a purely identity based level this is because of the lack of affinity and sense of belonging that exists

between *Ulster* Unionists and the Republic of Ireland, a continuation of the inverted elective affinity framework of this chapter. They, being *Ulster* Unionists, already see the border between the two countries as something that is fixed and existent and as such do not appear to have concerns over a perceived hardening of this border. A hard border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland may actually strengthen the position of Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom. It would clearly show there is a boundary between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland that exists and will remain until the Northern Irish electorate as a whole choose to leave the United Kingdom and form a United Ireland. The same can be said in regards to allegiance. *Ulster* Unionists give their allegiance to the Union, the Monarchy and Westminster, not to the Republic of Ireland. The relationship between *Ulster* Unionists and the Republic of Ireland is one that is purely instrumentally economic for cross border trade currently accounts for around 37% of Northern Irish exports (Whysall, 2016: 2). Equally, as the United Kingdom is one of the main trading partners of the Republic of Ireland there is the concern that a border of any sort could have negative implications on trade (Jenkins, 2017).

Interviewee 28 (2016) addressed this in the statement:

> 'Will there be a hard border put in place? Umm, I think we need to look at it and this is where we don't look at it on a wider Union aspect in its entirety. We need to look at it from a Northern Ireland point of view.'

However, just what is this 'Northern Ireland point of view'? It cannot be a one-size-fits-all approach as not everyone in Northern Ireland is on the same page in regards to Brexit (Gormley-Heenan *et al*, 2017). One immediate consequence of the referendum was the influx of applications for Irish passports from Northern Irish residents as many worried about the changes to travel across Europe resulting from the United Kingdom leaving the European Union (Mortimer, 2016). Perhaps most telling was that Post Offices in East Belfast ran out of Irish passport application forms. This is interesting considering the usually negative connotations of Irish identity within the Unionist community (Todd, 2005: 445). This has more to do (mainly) with the instrumental purpose of retaining freedom of movement across

Europe post-Brexit rather than a show of Unionist support for Irishness or Europeanness. It is an interesting position considering the attitude of some participants towards being perceived as European. As argued by Interviewee 1 (2015), 'My identity is British, it's not European, you know?' Interviewee 2 (2015) was also passionate in rejecting any claim to feeling European in the statement, 'No, I don't feel European at all. Ah, I feel that the continent is a foreign country, even though they take a lot of our money.' As has been discussed within Chapter Five, choosing to hold an Irish passport does not necessarily relate to having an Irish identity. This again is a case of instrumentalism as the decision of Northern Irish Unionists to obtain an Irish passport after the outcome of the European referendum is purely self-interested without any sense of political commitment, allegiance or affinity.

7.5: Conclusion

As addressed within this chapter the relationship between the United Kingdom and the European Union can be described using the framework of inverted elective affinity. By being able to flip the elective affinity framework to fit the reverse scenario provides confirmation of its existence for Unionists *within* the United Kingdom and its ability to accurately describe the relationship between the component parts of the Union. As both the Scottish independence referendum and the European referendum have illustrated, the ties which bind the United Kingdom can be extremely fragile. Elective affinity not only reconciles the allegiance and identity, contract and solidarity and instrumental and non-instrumental tropes of Britishness, but also secures these bonds at a time of constitutional unrest and upheaval and the answers provided by the participants in Part Two of this thesis demonstrate how elective affinity can provide an understanding of how *Ulster* Unionists think as they do. This will be further addressed within Chapter Eight and Chapter Nine of this thesis.

The findings outlined and discussed within this chapter, even though the majority of the data was collected before the referendum was held, accurately reflects the voting patterns of Unionist voters in Northern Ireland. This illustrates that Unionist political representatives are in fact largely representative of their community as a whole. This is important in regards to the future of Northern Ireland within a post-Brexit United Kingdom. Northern Ireland may be the smallest part of the United Kingdom, but it is necessary that its voice is not lost within the discussions currently taking place surrounding the future of the United Kingdom (see section 7.4). 'The days of being a "Remainer" or a "Brexiteer" are over. It is time to come together and work collectively to identify and exploit the positive potential for Northern Ireland' (Ulster Unionist Party, 2016: 2; House of Commons, 2016-2017: 3). This is the Unionist position now – but it is contested within the United Kingdom and, of course, within Northern Ireland.

The elephant in the room of this chapter has been the lack of responses from Unionist participants on the issue of the border. Given the fact that the border has become one of the biggest questions surrounding the United Kingdom's process of leaving the European Union in recent months, one would assume that if these interviews were repeated today the border would have a starring role. Many of the interviews conducted took place in 2015 and early 2016, before the European referendum was held. The participants interviewed at that time were more focused on issues such as their perceived lack of sovereignty within the United Kingdom and concerns over the bureaucracy of the European Union on daily politics in the United Kingdom. These are reasons to justify leaving the European Union. The practical problems of how the United Kingdom would look after it had left the European Union was not a major concern for participants at this stage as the referendum had not yet happened.

This chapter highlights some of the difficulties currently faced by the United Kingdom. No region can be left out of discussions as these will have implications

for the future of the United Kingdom as a whole. In regards to the Scottish independence referendum, even though the Scottish electorate voted to remain within the United Kingdom, it has still caused damage to relations within the United Kingdom which must now be addressed in order to balance tensions. The United Kingdom is in an uncertain time as a result of these events and the thesis will not attempt to sugar coat this fact. All across the Union there is a sense of disenfranchisement and unrest which if not addressed properly by politicians will led to even greater instability in the future. The United Kingdom has survived a challenging couple of years. *Survived*, yes, but one could not necessarily say that it has *thrived* as a result of this. Within the near future there is still more uncertainty on the horizon in regards to Brexit. One could not estimate how much more strain the ties which bind the United Kingdom could take until it is irrevocably damaged to the point of no return (Ashcroft and Bevir, 2016: 355). These questions and more will be addressed within Chapter Eight when the future of the United Kingdom will be discussed from the perspective of *Ulster* Unionists.

Chapter Eight

Questions of political narrative

'You'd have to laugh if it wasn't so bloody tragic.'

(Interviewee 32, 2016)

8.1: Introduction

This chapter explores the competing political narratives which face Ulster Unionists regarding the future of the United Kingdom. Political scientist Robert Hazell once stated 'The United Kingdom is a union of four nations that works in practice but not in theory' (2006: 37). Change, and the ability to react to this change, is nothing new within the history of the United Kingdom. The United Kingdom has undergone major transitions throughout its existence and in its present day form it has only existed since 1922 with the creation of the Irish Free State (British Institute of International and Comparative Law, 2015: 1). Today it is different from what it was in the past and of what it will be in the future - if it survives. The question that this chapter will address is whether the United Kingdom has finally been confronted with a situation that it cannot adapt to as a whole. Political scientists such as Richard Rose have argued that recent events such as the Scottish independence referendum of 2014 and its continued implications, and the European referendum of 2016 and the decision to leave the European Union have the possibility to break up the Union (Rose, 2016). Recent political and constitutional turmoil has divided the United Kingdom along cultural, political and national lines. A 2015 report by the Constitution Unit and edited by Hazell outlines the importance of academic research into this area in the statement, 'The interests of the Union need to be grasped as never before, at the point when politics may be more fragmented than ever' (Hazell, 2015: 8). However, the United Kingdom is yet to collapse and the result of the 2014 Scottish independence referendum had put to rest discussions

surrounding endism and the Union, at least until the 2016 European referendum (Aughey, 2010b).

The thesis began by looking at a singular question: What is the United Kingdom for in the twenty-first century (Trench, 2008)? What has been derived so far is that the Union has survived long above the expected life span of a union state through the effective merging of political representation at national level with regional autonomy, or to put it another way, the United Kingdom has found a way to resolve George Boyce's 1998 distinction effectively (see Chapter Two, section 2:2). This is key to understanding the complexity of identity within the United Kingdom as 'We certainly cannot assume that "national identity" trumps other identities, or indeed that one "national identity" must trump others' - and in the case of the United Kingdom it has not (Mandler, 2006: 297; Aughey, 2007a: 484; Clark, 2001: 261). However, this does not mean that the Union does not face some stark challenges. With the issues of Scottish Nationalism, English votes for English laws, the United Kingdom leaving the European Union and the continued challenge of Irish Nationalism, there are numerous factors with the ability to unsettle the stability of the United Kingdom. In particular, could it be that a reunified Ireland is the best option for Northern Ireland (Meagher, 2016)? Is it therefore possible that the United Kingdom has reached the end of the road and that one or more of the challenges mentioned could lead to the eventual break-up of the Union?

For Rose in 1982 Northern Ireland provided the best case study for the United Kingdom as a state (see Chapter Three, section 3:2). This is still the case today. By providing an up-to-date approach to Rose's work this chapter will address the choice of the United Kingdom between two *ultimate* narratives: break-up versus continuity and what implications this has on Unionist identity and on the fear of not belonging concept that has been discussed within this thesis. By examining the views of Unionist designated politicians in Northern Ireland this chapter will address the following future oriented questions: Where can the United Kingdom go from

here? What does this mean for British identity? Finally, what does this mean for Unionists in Northern Ireland? Is Northern Ireland now mainstream within British politics as Rose suggested decades earlier or is it still a place apart on the periphery, too British to truly belong (Rose, 1982; McLean and McMillan, 2005; see Chapter Three, section 3.4)? Are Unionist politicians optimistic or pessimistic about Northern Ireland's place in the United Kingdom? These questions will be addressed in regards to the narratives of break-up and continuity which are currently facing the United Kingdom.

8.2: Integration or Disintegration?

Throughout the previous chapters events have been mentioned which have had the potential to cause disintegration to the United Kingdom. Devolution, Nationalism in Scotland, Northern Ireland and England, and the decision of the United Kingdom to leave the European Union have all been considered a risk to the stability and future of the Union. In order to understand the views of Unionist politicians on the future of the Union participants for this research were asked the following question:

It has been suggested from the 1970s that the Union will break. Can you envisage the Union breaking?

This question was asked with a specific objective in mind and that was to ascertain how strong the Union currently is in the minds of Northern Irish Unionists, individuals who have been campaigning for the continuation of the United Kingdom for decades due to the history of ethno-national conflict experienced within Northern Ireland (Nairn, 1977; Pocock, 1975). In Chapter Six and Chapter Seven participants were questioned on their views of the two largest political events to happen in the United Kingdom in recent years, the Scottish independence referendum of 2014 and the European referendum of 2016. The future of the Union question was asked to ascertain if they felt that these events have had a serious impact on the stability of the United Kingdom.

Overall the answers given by the participants to this question showed a high level of realism about the stability of the United Kingdom. Twenty participants answered that they could not envisage the Union breaking, nine could envisage the Union breaking, and one participant did not provide a conclusive answer (Fig.8.1). For some, such as Interviewee 6 (2015), the thought of the Union breaking was inconceivable, 'No. I mean, why would it break?' The belief that solidarity would overcome any perceived threats to the contractual aspects of the Union was common among the participants. Of the twenty participants who responded that they could not envisage the Union breaking an overwhelming theme that emerged time and time again was of the United Kingdom being strong against perceived the weakness of threats to the Union posed by challenges such as Scottish Nationalism. The United Kingdom was often cited as being the best constitutional arrangement for all four component parts as it provided stability and financial benefits for all, 'I have every confidence it will continue. Ah, I think it has served the people of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland very well for generations' (Interviewee 19, 2015). Superficially, this approach to the Union focused on the instrumental benefits but in context it is only superficial. There were also answers that highlighted the affinity which exists between the regions of the United Kingdom, such as Interviewee 21 (2015) stating that, 'Unity is strength and strength supports us.' The theme of unity through diversity is one that has been recurrent throughout this thesis (see Chapter Two) and contrasts with the discussion in Chapter Seven. This connects theoretically to Benedict Anderson's concept of the imagined community in that the perceived ties which bind the four regions of the United Kingdom are stronger that the sum of the individual component parts (2006). This feeling of solidarity and non-instrumental allegiance which exists in the United Kingdom provides a strong defence against potential disintegration. Although Scottish Nationalism was not put to rest for a generation after the 2014 independence referendum as had been hoped, it did highlight the importance of affinity in maintaining a union state (see Chapter Six).

Whilst much of this feeling of belonging within the United Kingdom is created by shared culture, history, language and identity there is also another aspect to the Union which is less romantic, that of the instrumental financial and economic benefits it provides each region. This much more pragmatic approach to the continuation of the Union acknowledges that financial and political stability are often viewed as important as the non-tangible feelings of affinity. As stated by Interviewee 1 (2015), the break-up of the United Kingdom '… would be disastrous. No, we would lose influence on the world stage. Economically there would be big questions around that.' Many of these financial benefits that participants mentioned come from the Barnett formula, the formula by which money from Westminster is distributed to the devolved regions (Keep, 2016: 3). This formula calculates the way that public expenditure in England has 'consequentials' for the devolved regions of the United Kingdom, such as £10,876 per head in Northern Ireland (Wilkinson, 2015; Barnett, 2000). However, while the participants questioned spoke of the positives of the financial benefits, for others across the United Kingdom this is a bone of contention. Not every region of the United Kingdom benefits from the Barnett formula in the same way as Northern Ireland, particularly England as it is the only region not devolved. For example, England receives £8,529 per head, while Scotland receives £10,152 per head. As stated by Lord Barnett himself, 'The formula was intended to be approximately population based and was intended as a stopgap until a needs-based system came into operation', yet this move forward has never happened and the Barnett formula remains in place unchanged (2000: 69). The Northern Ireland Assembly currently depends on the block grant from Westminster as it is unable to make up the deficit in public spending itself. Therefore any changes to the Union could have drastic economic implications for Northern Ireland.

The views of the participants interviewed for this research displayed at times both an instrumental and a primordial understanding of their connection to the Union and its future (McLean and McMillan, 2005).

> 'The majority of people in Northern Ireland wish to remain within the Union and for some it is emotional reasons, cultural reasons. For others it is more financial, but there is a clear majority.' (Interviewee 24, 2015)

Participants such as interviewee 3 (2015) discussed how the Union was the best constitutional arrangement for Northern Ireland, while other participants such as Interviewee 20 (2015) talked about encouraging people 'emotionally… theologically and culturally towards the Union.' These viewpoints tie in with Jennifer Todd's 1987 typology of Unionism which can also be analysed in similar ways to that of McLean and McMillan: British Unionist and Ulster Loyalist. Within academia these two concepts have traditionally tended to be separated as two different classifications of Unionists. This black and white description of Unionism in Northern Ireland disregards the rich and complex nature of Northern Irish Unionism within the United Kingdom. The evidence of this thesis affirms another approach - elective affinity - to both explain and reconcile the paradoxes of Britishness and Unionism that were discussed in Part One of this thesis.

However nine of the participants interviewed, almost a third, stated that they *could* envisage the United Kingdom breaking up. Of these responses, the answers given tended to revolve around the threat of Scottish Nationalism and the possible consequences of the European referendum. As expressed by Interviewee 18 (2015):

> 'So, ah, yes I could see the United Kingdom breaking up, certainly not in the near future, or in the medium term, but in politics, "Events dear boy, events". You know, things can change.'

This feeling of concern among Unionists for the long-term future of the United Kingdom is one that cannot be taken lightly. Implicit is the concern that at some point a constitutional earthquake could shake the foundations of the Union. The questions raised by the Scottish independence referendum in 2014 created a sense of unrest in the United Kingdom which feeds the concern of *Ulster* Unionists. Interviewee 17 (2015) expressed this concern when proposing that 'The peak danger now seems to be Scotland and the issues which are arising out of the

Nationalist movement in Scotland. I think it is very divisive.' The subsequent referendum on the United Kingdom's future in the European Union has done little to alleviate these concerns within Unionism. One participant did not provide a definite answer to this question, stating only 'Who knows?' Uncertainty and doubt is another core theme that has emerged throughout the thesis. Doubt, as outlined within Chapter Three, section 3.3, is often connected to the Ulster British identity in regards to the question of: Are *Ulster* Unionists British or not British? However, in this scenario the doubt, as the thesis argued, is not self-doubt but over events and external pressures which could affect their position as citizens of the United Kingdom.

> 'I could envisage the union breaking up. I think if, ah, for example, the UK votes for Brexit … So yeah, I think there is an existential threat to the UK as we sit today' (Interviewee 7, 2015).

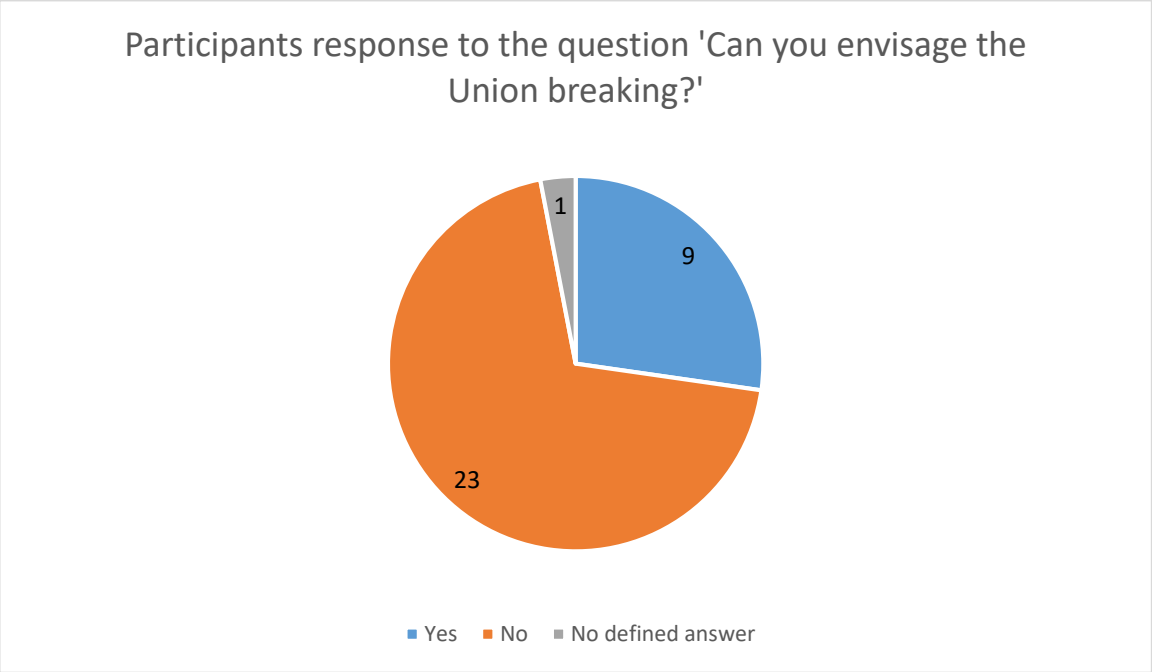
Interviewee 17 (2015), expressed concerns that:

> 'I just think there is going to be severe trouble ahead in Scotland and I think that's where the biggest danger to the Union actually lies. It no longer lies within what we would have traditionally thought was Northern Ireland, which is bizarre [laughs].'

If anything, this concern at being able to envisage the Union breaking is actually a sign of the strength of the Unionists interviewed. They believe in the Union and they want it to survive, but they understand that there are forces which can break it and that these cannot be ignored. This is a practical Unionism that is not afraid to look at the worst case scenario for the future of the United Kingdom. It would perhaps say more about *Ulster* Unionism if it did not recognise the threat that exists to the Union from nationalism and events such as leaving the European Union.

Fig 8.1: Participants response to the question 'Can you envisage the Union breaking?'

Graph portraying the breakdown of participant responses to the question of 'Can you envisage the Union breaking?' In response, twenty stated that they could not envisage the Union breaking, nine observed that they could envisage the Union breaking, and one participant did not provide a defined answer to this question.



One observation from the findings which is relevant to this thesis is the recurring theme that the Union is ever evolving and that this is a strength and a survival method. This connects the viewpoints of participants with what political historians such as Linda Colley see as the benefits of a flexible Union (2014: 90). Interviewee 11 (2015) observed this strength of the United Kingdom in the comment, 'So I don't think the Union is under threat. I think it will continue to change and evolve over the decades to come and I think that's inevitable.' This is notable as it connects two distinctive areas of this research, British identity and the future of the Union, in a clear and structured fashion. Both the Union itself and the overarching identity of Britishness in the United Kingdom can be accurately described as ever changing.

Throughout its history the United Kingdom has met with changes or threats which potentially would have separated other nations yet has only had the effect of strengthening the Union. This ability to adapt is what has kept the United Kingdom together. The ever changing nature of the United Kingdom has allowed it to merge the four regions together and allow them to develop distinctively whilst still being common members of the United Kingdom. In the words of Interviewee 2 (2015):

> 'the Union is always at evolving point. It's an evolving, and more of a sponge that changes. I think that's its best and ultimate strength … I think we have to allow the Union to be able to breathe like that and to be flexible, to be agile.'

This method of preservation may continue to underpin the Union for years to come, but just what issues do the participants feel that the United Kingdom is facing?

Table 8.1: Summary of participant's responses on whether the Union could break

This table provides a condensed synopsis of the answers provided by participants in order to provide an overview to the types of varied responses which this question received.

Participant	Overview of answer	Summary
1	No	The United Kingdom would lose influence on the world stage if it separated. There would be economic problems.
2	No	The Union is always evolving. The Union is strong.
3	No	The Union has survived threats before. This is now an opportunity for the United Kingdom to regroup.
4	No	The separate parts could not survive alone. '…the world needs a strong UK.'

5	No	The Union is '…as strong as it's ever been.' The people of Scotland are turning from separatism.
6	No	The Scottish referendum was a danger, but the result was positive.
7	Yes	Brexit could cause a second Scottish independence referendum.
8	No	A United Ireland cannot be forced upon the people of Northern Ireland
9	No	No self-sustainability within the regions Devolution satisfies the self-determination of regions
10		
11	No	The Union will evolve Threats to the Union have been over-hyped
12	Yes	The threat is from Northern Ireland, not from Scotland English votes for English laws is a threat
13	Yes	It could if Scotland left the United Kingdom
14	No	Brexit could have an impact
15	No	Scotland could leave, but it would be detrimental to everyone in the Union
16		
17	Yes	Scotland is the biggest danger to the Union, not Northern Ireland
18	Yes	The Union is always changing
19	No	The Union has served people well
20	No	The Union can accommodate different views
21	No	'Strength is unity and unity supports us.'
22	Yes	Scotland is the issue within the United Kingdom
23	No	The Union is strong

24	No	The Union will survive, but it might look different
25	Yes	Scotland is the threat, not Northern Ireland
26	Yes	Brexit could lead to another Scottish independence referendum
27	No	There is value in the Union
28	Yes	Northern Ireland is safe Scotland and England are the problem
29	No	The Union could change in the future
30	No	Northern Ireland is secure within the Union
31	No	Confident in the Union
32	Don't know	Northern Ireland is not the biggest threat anymore
33	No	There will never be a United Ireland English Nationalism is the biggest threat
34	No	Not in their lifetime
35	No	Need a constitution

As presented in Table 3, the responses received from participants to the question of the break-up of the Union produced some interesting findings. First of all, the overwhelming theme to emerge from the answers is that Northern Ireland's place is secure in the Union, although this does not necessarily mean that the Union *itself* is secure (Table 3). This observation often came across in interviews as both a point of pride for Unionism in Northern Ireland and as a source of self-depreciating humour and shock. The aspect of pride comes from the irony that Northern Ireland, the place apart in the United Kingdom for decades, had become (perhaps) one of the most stable regions within the Union. According to Interviewee 12 (2015):

> 'You know, at one stage I suppose everybody thought if the Union was going to break it would be Northern Ireland who would either be leaving or be

> kicked out. Actually I think that is less and less likely and it's certainly less likely than most of the time I was involved in politics'.

The humorous aspect came from the shock factor that Northern Ireland's displacement as the area causing concern to the United Kingdom is by Scotland, something that no one perceived a generation ago:

> 'The real threat to me comes from the narrowness of the Scottish referendum. I mean, I believe if there was a referendum held in Northern Ireland about being part of the United Kingdom it wouldn't be as tight as it was in Scotland' (Interviewee 12, 2015).

This unlikely change is still something which has an air of the surreal about it for some participants, 'I never thought that the risk to the Union would come from another part of the Union' (Interviewee 26, 2016). Interviewee 25 (2016) also expressed this sentiment in the comment, 'I think if there is any weakness it is to do with Scotland, it certainly isn't to do with Northern Ireland.' In Chapter Four of this thesis, section 4.2 examined the idea whether Unionist doubt over belonging in the United Kingdom had a negative impact upon their identity which resulted in a hyperreal Britishness based on a sense of not-belonging and existential doubt. The evidence here suggests that this is no longer the case (at least at the time when the interviews were conducted).

An overwhelming finding from this chapter is that the participants view Northern Ireland as secure within the United Kingdom. The Principle of Consent has secured the position of Northern Ireland within the Union unless a border poll shows that the majority of the Northern Irish electorate wish to vote to leave the United Kingdom and join a United Ireland. Within Unionism there is little support for a border poll in Northern Ireland. A 2017 LucidTalk poll found that only 8.6% of Unionists believe that there should be a border poll within the next five years with 52.8% stating that there should be no border poll ever. These figures change whenever political affiliation is removed from the equation and national identity is used as the defining characteristic. For those who identify as British, 17.7% believe that a border poll should be held within five years compared to 14.2% of those who

identify as British and Northern Irish (LucidTalk, 2017). In regards to those who do not believe that a border poll should be held, this accounted for 46.6% of British identifiers and 36.9% of British and Northern Irish identifiers (LucidTalk, 2017). What this poll shows is that there is less support for a border poll from those who identify as British only and that Unionists in particular do not wish to see a border poll as this is a perceived threat to the Union.

The decision of the United Kingdom to leave the European Union had not been made when most of these interviews were conducted, yet participants still believed that it held a potential threat to the Union. With England and Wales voting to leave the European Union and Scotland and Northern Ireland having voted to remain, what does this mean for the future of the United Kingdom? As it stands, the Union has been split by this referendum. It is not merely enough to say that the will of the majority is final in a situation like this. Yes, in regards to democracy the people of the United Kingdom *overall* voted to leave the European Union, but it is necessary to address the large proportion of the population who do not wish to leave. For those people, and in particular the regions of Scotland and Northern Ireland, much needs to be done by the Westminster government to reassure them that their fears are being acknowledged and that every attempt will be made to include them in the process of leaving the European Union. If this is not done, or it is only half managed, then it is not a huge leap forward to predict that the very fabric of the United Kingdom is in peril. One obvious way this could happen would be through a successful second Scottish independence referendum. Ever since the referendum on the European Union was called, First Minister of Scotland Nicola Sturgeon has argued that as Scotland wishes to remain in the European Union, they will have to seriously consider another independence referendum in order to secure their place within Europe (BBC News, 2016a).

Although the Ulster Unionist Party did not support the Leave campaign, it accepts the democratic decision of the whole of the United Kingdom to leave the European

Union (Ulster Unionist Party, 2016). This highlights the contract and solidarity trope of the thesis as even though this was not the decision which the leadership of the Ulster Unionist Party would have wanted, they understand that in order for the United Kingdom to successfully leave the European Union each part of the Union must accept and support this decision. For the Democratic Unionist Party who supported the Leave campaigned, the result of the United Kingdom shows elective affinity in action. During this referendum the Democratic Unionist Party was in line with the majority of the British electorate by wishing to leave the European Union and this underpins a shared sense of affinity across the Union in regards to the feeling that they are better off without Europe (Foster, 2016).

What would happen to British identity if such an apocalyptic situation were to befall the United Kingdom? Would the organic nature of Britishness allow it to survive even this? In short this thesis believes the answer to this may be yes, Britishness will survive, but not in the way it is perceived today. Instead a growth in English identity will be observed within England and Wales, while in Northern Ireland and Scotland regional identities will emerge at the fore of national rhetoric. Within Northern Ireland, what would this look like? For a start, Unionists in Northern Ireland would be in a situation they could never have envisaged in their wildest and most troubled of nightmares. For decades Unionists in Northern Ireland have held onto the Union with Great Britain as a lifeline, a preservation of all they hold dear and the centre of all their traditions and ideologies. They truly feel they belong to this culture and heritage; fully involving themselves in the promotion of this imagined community (Anderson, 2006). How could Britishness survive in a Northern Ireland which is no longer a part of the Union? If Northern Ireland were to merge with the Republic of Ireland it could be argued that this may have the effect of polarising identity even more within Northern Ireland. As argued by Jenkins (1996: 89), 'People collectively identify themselves and others, and they conduct their everyday lives in terms of those identities, which therefore have practical consequences.' This is very true in regards to the context of the ethno-national conflict which has provided the background to identity in Northern Ireland

for decades. Unionists who feel their identity is being directly threatened within a United Ireland may in fact go to the very extremes of their identity in order to try and preserve and reinforce their own group singularity. This would be an odd situation for Northern Irish Unionists to find themselves in as they have traditionally enjoyed the position of being the dominant identity within their country. In a United Ireland they would find themselves an extremely small minority. Feeling threatened, this may led to an outbreak of violence and even a civil war within a newly created thirty-two county Ireland unless provisions were in place to ensure that their rights were met. In a case like this, 'to achieve positive social identity, ingroup-outgroup comparisons must yield perceived differences which favour the ingroup' and it is only after this has been achieved that positive movement can be made (Turner, 1978: 236). This is a hypothetical scenario that has been put forward by this thesis as an example of what may happen in a situation such as this. It is not the purpose of this thesis, but it is something that would benefit from further research in order to examine this more, particularly given the current uncertainties surrounding the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

How would Unionists in this situation be able to express their identity? If Northern Ireland were to leave the United Kingdom it may be they would no longer be allowed to remain as British citizens and that they therefore would not be under the Union flag. In a scenario like this it is to be expected that a more enhanced and hyper version of Ulster identity may be created with the express purpose of trying to ensure a degree of control over their identity. On the other side of the argument, Unionists finding themselves in a United Ireland may react by embracing their Irish heritage. However, this seems unlikely and if it were to happen it would probably be in the form of a more richly developed version of a Northern Irish identity rather than that of an Irish identity.

> 'No, I just think that, I think that there is a real value in the Union and I think most people see it and maybe we just need to make it work better. I think we need to probably let each individual be valued for their individual identity, but as part of the Union it is something to be valued as well. So, sure I am a forever optimist. Yeah, I think we have work on our hands to do

> and, ah, I think it's not something we can rest easy on, but I think work needs to be done on it and I think we will win.' (Interviewee 27, 2016)

What does this say about British identity? As observed by McCrone (1992: 195), 'the question to ask is not how best do cultural forms reflect an essential national identity, but how do cultural forms actually help to construct and shape identity. . .' What this thesis shows is that British identity within *Ulster* Unionism is not an alien sort of Britishness, but that it is a vital component of it. Difference within the United Kingdom is not detrimental and in fact helps to cement a sense of affinity across the Union as the differences within each nation help to give Britishness meaning. Difference integrates the component parts of the United Kingdom, it does not lead to its disintegration.

8.3: Peripheral or Mainstream?

The United Kingdom is facing critical questions at the moment: questions of national belonging and questions about the future of the Union post-Brexit. These are questions which Northern Ireland also has to face. A key issue for this thesis is the role Northern Ireland plays in the United Kingdom going forward. What role Northern Ireland will play in the United Kingdom in the future is based upon whether its fate is considered peripheral to the United Kingdom or whether it is central to it. This is what will be discussed in this section.

Traditionally Northern Ireland has been thought of as the problem child within the United Kingdom. If any region were to break away, surely it would be Northern Ireland? The Republican dream of a thirty-two county sovereign Irish Republic was often cited during the armed struggle and this has always been a risk to the territory and sense of imagined community which binds the United Kingdom (Smith, 1971: Anderson, 2006). Yet this has not happened. In 1998 the Good Friday Agreement was signed. As part of this agreement it was understood that the Republic of Ireland would hold a referendum on removing Articles 2 and 3 from its constitution (Access Research Knowledge, 2002). These articles laid claim to the

territory of Northern Ireland. The response of the Irish people was overwhelming with 94% voting to remove the claim (Access Research Knowledge, 2002). This was a clear sign that the Republic of Ireland, like the United Kingdom, was largely indifferent to Northern Ireland. According to Coakley (2002: 25), 'southern acceptance of the constitutional status quo, strikingly demonstrated in the 1998 referendum that followed the Good Friday Agreement suggests that the pursuit of political stability has taken a decisive lead over traditional irredentism in the mind of the southern electorate'. Republicans and Nationalists in the North asserted this was only a temporary measure and that the long hoped for United Ireland would still happen in the future. Yet at this stage a United Ireland looks further away than ever since 1920. The rise in Nationalism recently has come not from Northern Ireland, but from Scotland. With Scotland challenging their place within the United Kingdom, Nationalists in Northern Ireland are watching carefully and quietly to see how the situation unfolds. If Scotland votes to leave the United Kingdom, then this gives Northern Ireland the perfect opportunity to slip out of the door behind Scotland without anyone really paying much attention. The current feelings of disenchantment felt within the United Kingdom may have the response of causing a domino effect across the Union, with one region leaving after another. Interviewees identified a number of key points.

The old adage that nobody wants Northern Ireland is not necessary wrong, yet Northern Ireland is a position where it is not able to push for independence. Firstly, Northern Ireland as a country cannot possibly 'go it alone' as it is not financially secure enough to do so and survive.

> 'I don't know how. Umm, ah, you know a lot of factors have to come into play and even ones that you think maybe shouldn't. Self-sustainability is the … priority because that you can only realistically see the Union breaking up if each of the regions can actually sustain themselves. NI couldn't. It's a wee tiny, tiny place compared with, you know, even in the UK it's a small place, but in the world it's very tiny. You know, so the region, or the UK would break up I'd say if Northern Ireland became part of a United Ireland.' (Interviewee 9, 2015)

Geographically Northern Ireland is an extremely small country with a population of only 1.86 million (NISRA, 2015). As is occurring within most western liberal democracies the manufacturing sector is collapsing, for example recent job losses in Northern Ireland such as the closure of JTI Group in Ballymena in the constituency of North Antrim. Northern Ireland is a key financial beneficiary from United Kingdom membership. As it currently stands it is dependent on the Westminster subvention. European funds financing the financial situation in Northern Ireland are even more precariously placed at this moment due to the uncertainty surrounding the United Kingdom's decision to leave the European Union. The European Union currently helps to fund a plethora of different areas within Northern Ireland, from cross-community initiatives to agricultural policies (Department of the Economy, 2017). Without this, Northern Ireland will definitely feel the pinch and will have to hold onto the purse strings even tighter once Article 50 is triggered.

Secondly, the Good Friday Agreement does not allow provision for Northern Ireland to become independent. The people of Northern Ireland will either choose to remain as a part of the United Kingdom or they will choose to leave and become a part of a United Ireland. Nowhere in this Agreement does it provide a third choice of independence. This is important as in a hypothetical independent Northern Ireland where would the protections be for members of each ethno-national community? The history of Northern Ireland is one of ethno-national conflict between two communities and these tensions have been managed through the safeguards that were established within the Good Friday Agreement of 1998 (Northern Ireland Office, 1998). Under this both the Irish and British governments have the ability to assist and influence matters within Northern Ireland. This is a measure which allows members of each community to feel their interests are being protected by forces outside of the Northern Irish government. Either way one thing is certain; Northern Ireland can either continue as part of the United Kingdom or it can merge with the Republic of Ireland to create a thirty-two county United Ireland,

but most certainly it cannot survive independently. Interviewee 13 (2015) raised Northern Irish independence and its problems in that statement:

> 'So, economically it would be a disaster and that's why when there was a Northern Ireland independence movement it got less than 1% of the vote because people could not see it working and there was no political will for it either.'

The impact of Brexit on Northern Ireland may influence this. Unlike any other part of the United Kingdom, Northern Ireland shares a land border with a European Union member state, the Republic of Ireland. This not only raises questions about what type of border should be created, meaning a hard border or a soft border, but also about what impact this may have on identity within Northern Ireland (Gormley-Heenan and Aughey, 2017: 503). Many have argued that due to the United Kingdom's decision to leave the European Union and the majority vote in Northern Ireland to remain this would be a good reason to create a United Ireland. By joining with the Republic of Ireland, this would enable Northern Ireland to remain as part of the European Union and to continue to receive the benefits that this entails (Rowley, 2016; Humphries and Ferguson, 2016). One of the most interesting consequences of the European referendum was that the morning the vote was announced there was a sharp rise in the number of members of the Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist community in Northern Ireland applying for an Irish passport. Post Offices in East Belfast actually ran out of application forms following the result of the referendum. Even Unionist politicians such as Ian Paisley Junior MP encouraged members of the Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist community to take up this opportunity (Payton, 2016). What does this narrative tell us about British identity? To give the short answer: very little. This would relate to a much more pragmatic view of Britishness in Northern Ireland that understands that the best interests of the country of Northern Ireland need to be taken into account. It could just have been done as a type of insurance policy, a measure to protect individuals travelling abroad after Brexit without actually saying anything deeper about their true political alignments. Northern Ireland has been spoilt in this regard as individuals from here have been fortunate enough to have either British or Irish

identities, or even both. It may be argued that people in Northern Ireland have become lackadaisical about national identity to a certain degree, although as argued by Mitchell and Todd, for Unionists in the North, 'Irishness is still the other even if Ireland is seen as more benign.' (Mitchell and Todd, 2007: 650). Should Northern Ireland receive special status as part of the United Kingdom's deal to leave the European Union? This is an emotive issue for Unionists as to have special status in regards to Brexit would mean that Northern Ireland would once again be at the periphery of the Union, rather than the mainstream position which it has been currently enjoying. While this may be preferred by European officials, there is still little known about what this would actually look like (O'Carroll, 2017). Would there be a border in the Irish Sea, effectively distancing Northern Ireland from Great Britain, or would a land border, even hard or soft be the route to go down (Meagher, 2017)? For *Ulster* Unionists these are the questions which now foster disquiet. For Unionists, their narrative is that they want to be seen as British by others within the United Kingdom and to be seen as a valued member of the Union. To be given special status over Brexit, or the possibility of a border being placed within the Irish Sea rather than between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland once again raises the issue that Northern Ireland is considered to be Irish, not British, by others within the United Kingdom (see Chapter Three, section 3.3.2).

Northern Ireland currently has a more mainstream position within British politics due to the Conservative Party/Democratic Unionist Party pact that was established after the 2017 General Election (see Chapter Three, section 3.4). But what does this mainstream position mean for Northern Ireland and its position within the United Kingdom in the future. What this position allows is for Northern Ireland to have greater influence over negotiating a deal for post-Brexit. 'I think we have to make sure that we keep on with our negotiations and try to get the best deal out of Europe possible and try to, you know, obviously unite the constituent parts of the UK as well' (Interviewee 29, 2016). On the 30th November 2017, Democratic Unionist Party MP Sammy Wilson stated that the party would remove their support from the Conservative Party if Northern Ireland was given special treatment during

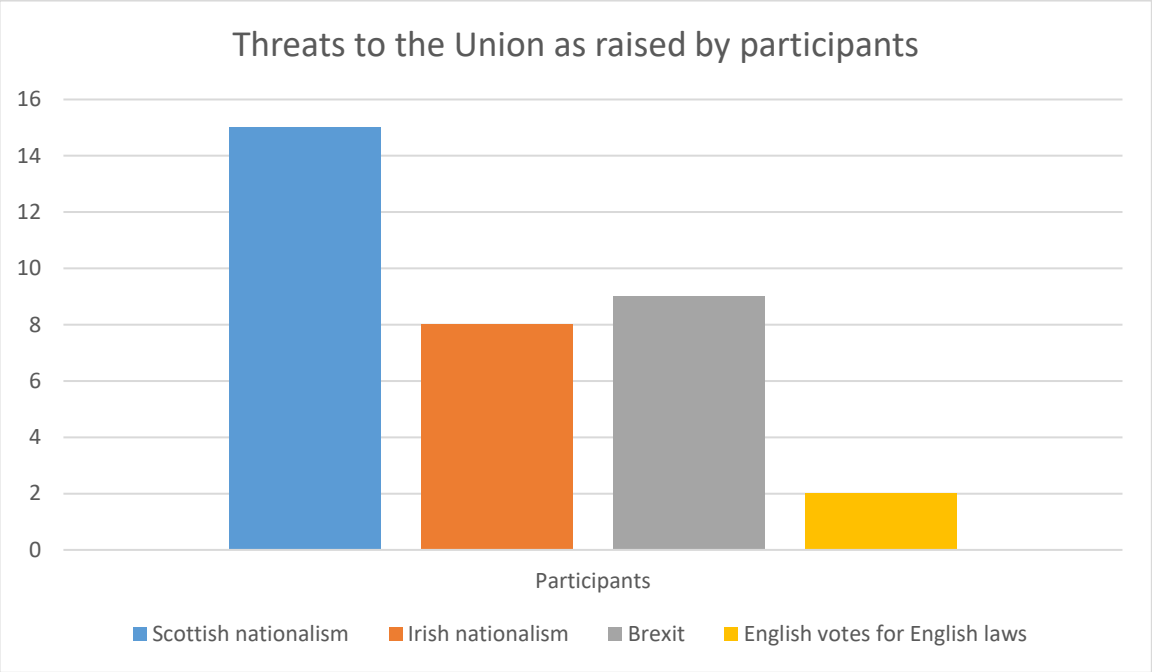
the Brexit negotiations that would set it apart from the rest of the United Kingdom (McDonald and Stewart, 2017). This is the crux of both the elective affinity framework and the negative interpretation of Unionist identity discussed in Chapter Four: *Ulster* Unionists want to be treated like everyone else within the United Kingdom, but they fear that they are not seen as the same by those within Great Britain (see Chapter Four, section 4.2; section 4.3). The Democratic Unionist Party now hold a position of power at Westminster and they appear to be using it to their advantage.

8.4: Optimism or Pessimism?

As the findings illustrate the majority of participants felt that the United Kingdom will not break up, yet they were still realistic about the threats that exist towards the Union. What then is the future of the United Kingdom? Where does Britishness go from here? Perhaps most importantly for this thesis, where do the interviewees believe *Ulster* Unionism fits into all of this? The United Kingdom as a state is a complex multinational state (Aughey, 2001b: 60). The United Kingdom is often ridiculed for its heavy reliance on what is known as 'pomp and ceremony', the traditions and institutions which make the United Kingdom, and subsequently Britishness, what they are today. While these traditions such as the Royal opening of parliament can at times seem archaic and strange they have helped to keep the United Kingdom together through many hardships and periods of historical upheaval. As observed by Palmer (1999: 135), '…the symbols that help to construct and to convey a sense of national identity are imagined to lie at the heart of a nation's soul.' What the United Kingdom does, Unionists continue to think it does well, and this is the core of the political – but not emotional - identification with the state.

Fig. 8.2: Threats to the Union as raised by participants

Graph showing what issues were raised by participants in response to the question on the breakup of the Union.



As portrayed by Fig.8.2 Scottish Nationalism was overwhelming raised by participants when discussing if they could envisage the Union breaking. Second was the European referendum and the uncertainty which has emerged about what a post-Brexit United Kingdom would look like particularly for Northern Ireland. Third, Irish Nationalism was cited as another concern to the Union, but most of the eight participants who raised this were talking about how the Union had overcome this threat in the past. This finding is significant in that it shows how secure *Ulster* Unionists felt that Northern Ireland's position within the Union remained secure. The threat of Irish Nationalism has quietened over recent years with IRA ceasefires and the Principle of Consent ensuring that no outside forces can remove Northern Ireland from the United Kingdom without the consent of the majority of its electorate. This feeling may also be due to the high level of media coverage which is being given to Scottish Nationalism, effectively overtaking Irish Nationalism (at the time of the interviews) as the biggest risk to the Union. Also, part of this may

be due to the fact that Irish Nationalists have signed up to power sharing in Northern Ireland, with the Democratic Unionist Party (then) working in government with Sinn Féin. This commitment to devolution also helps to ensure that Northern Ireland remains as a component part of the United Kingdom. The consensus appears to be that Irish Nationalism has in the past been one of the biggest threats to the continuation of the United Kingdom, but issues such as Scottish Nationalism and concerns over the implications of Brexit now overshadowed it. Finally, two participants expressed concern over how English votes for English laws may shape the future of the United Kingdom (Fig.8.2). These themes will now be examined in-depth along with an analysis of what these scenarios could mean for the future of the Union, Britishness and Unionism in Northern Ireland and how these connect to the themes of allegiance and identity, contract and solidarity and instrumentalism and non-instrumentalism that have been the framework of this thesis.

The primary challenge to the United Kingdom volunteered by interviewees is Scottish Nationalism. The Scottish electorate voted on the 14th September 2014 and concluded that Scotland was better off as part of the United Kingdom. The overall percentages, 55% Remain to 45% Leave, was not enough to silence the issue of Scottish independence forever, but it was accepted that this result would quieten the conversation for a generation (The Guardian, 2016; Salmond cited Johnson, 2014). Elections are expensive and referendums are particularly costly enterprises, surely another would not be held for a while? Unionists across the United Kingdom relaxed at the result to keep the Union intact, not least of all those from Northern Ireland. The Scottish independence referendum was the closest the United Kingdom had come to collapse since the Troubles. With the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998 Northern Ireland's position within the United Kingdom was contractually secured through the Principle of Consent. The vote was a resounding success on behalf of those who had created the Agreement with 71.1% of the Northern Irish electorate endorsing the Agreement (Access Research Knowledge, 1998). However, this did not stop the Democratic Unionist Party from still holding grave concerns about Northern Ireland's place within the Union. But

that was 1998 and this is 2017 and somewhere in the past nineteen years the Democratic Unionist Party has come to also support the Good Friday Agreement. This is due in part to the Democratic Unionist Party becoming a mainstream party and going into a power-sharing government with Sinn Féin in 2007 (Weaver, 2007).

Shock occurred when Scottish Nationalism emerged as the biggest threat within the Union. Yet the result of the referendum was a victory for the Remain campaign, although by a narrow margin.

> 'I mean, I think a blind man could have seen that the loss of Scotland I think inexorably would have led to the breakup of the Union, eventually. Now, we would have fought that tooth and nail, but there is absolutely no doubt things would unravel you would have had moves for greater devolution within the English regions, the Welsh would have started to become more militant and needless to say it would have been incredibly encouraging to the nationalist community here. So, you know, I think we've got over that hurdle. I think if we can get over the next one then it will be put to bed for a generation. But whilst other parts of the Union could break away and become independent the one part that couldn't is NI.' (Interviewee 13, 2015)

The result of the Scottish independence referendum was welcomed, but it would be reckless to state this is the last the United Kingdom will hear of Scottish independence. The vote meant that there was no definitive sense of victory within the Remain campaign despite the Government. Scotland as a country was effectively split down the middle on this decision. As those from Northern Ireland have the unfortunately ability to know first-hand, good things do not happen when a country within the United Kingdom is divided over issues of nationality. What is fascinating about this is that Scotland has taken over Northern Ireland's position as the most volatile place with the Union. Nicola Sturgeon, leader of the Scottish National party and current First Minister of Scotland, has often reiterated that she would like to hold another independence referendum (Carrell, 2016). However, this may not be as easy as it seems. A 2017 study by the British Election Survey found that Scottish Nationalist Party lost four out of ten of its supports over its strong stance on remaining within the European Union. This may have influences

of the percentage of Scottish voters in a second independence referendum who want to leave the United Kingdom, but it seems likely that this question will be asked again. The real catalyst in this resurgence was the decision via a referendum to leave the European Union.

> 'I could envisage the Union breaking up. I think if, ah, for example, the UK votes for Brexit, for leaving the EU, ah that will very swiftly be followed by a second vote on independence in Scotland and given the first vote and what has happened since in terms of the rise of the Scottish Nationalist Party think the vote would be to exit the UK. So, yeah, I think there is an existential threat to the UK as we sit today.' (Interviewee 7, 2015)

This came to pass on the 13th March 2017 when Nicola Sturgeon called for a second independence referendum (Maguire, 2017). Part of the reasoning behind this decision was due to the high percentage (62%) of the Scottish electorate how voted to remain as part of the European Union (BBC, 2017). This is an interesting situation as it raises the question of what union do the Scottish electorate feel more affinity towards, and which will they elect to remain a part of: the United Kingdom or the European Union?. What is interesting about this second demand for a Scottish independence referendum is the reaction of the Westminster government towards a referendum at this time as this would cause further instability within the United Kingdom during the already turbulent process of leaving the European Union, arguing that 'Right now we should be working together, not pulling apart' (Stewart, Walker and Carrell, 2017). This can be summarised as:

> 'we have a challenge to ensure that our component parts hold together and show that a smaller unit of nations holding together actually can be much stronger and better for the area' (Interviewee 2, 2015).

This view was also shared by Interviewee 11 (2015), who stated, 'I ultimately think that the four parts of the UK are better working together than they would be separating'. These statements may appear to be instrumental, but they also show an elective aspect to the relation between the component parts of the United Kingdom. There is also an aspect of affinity to maintaining the United Kingdom that is dependent upon shared experience and solidarity across the Union. Interviewee 26 (2016) describes this in the statement:

> 'I think the strength of the United Kingdom is the union and I think, ah, while we have been able to adapt and have been able to, I suppose, develop our own different identities, the fact that we on many occasions can come together on issues of common cause I think is something to be valued and the United Kingdom and the devolved regions I think are better and closer and stronger when they are within the union and I was very concerned that what Scotland was doing. While I have a lot of time and respect for many of the people in Scotland, ah, and it's a place we love to visit, I would be very sad and very disappointed of Scotland didn't remain within the United Kingdom.'

Questions now have to be asked as to why Scottish Nationalism is enjoying so much prominence in contemporary Scotland. As observed by Agnew (1984: 193), 'Scottish nationalism is more than the Scottish National Party', so why has it gathered momentum in the first place? Is the rise of Scottish nationalism 'about viewing the Union with England as so fundamentally bad in every way that it must be ended sooner rather than later, or is it more about presenting a long-term, socio-economic strategy?', as argued by Leith and Steven (2010: 286). To refer back to Anderson and Smith (2006; 1971), it could be argued that the territorial aspect of Scotland has led to an insular sense of Scottish community and identity which does not need the United Kingdom to feel a sense of belonging and purpose. This also ties in with the writings of Agnew who discussed 'nationalism in Scotland as a reflection of national cultural traditions and emerging economic interests that differentiate Scotland from the rest of the British political system' (Agnew, 1984: 192). What the situation in Scotland does is to secure Northern Ireland within the Union to a degree.

On the 19th September 2014, the morning after the Scottish independence referendum, Unionists across the United Kingdom breathed a collective sigh of relief. This however was to be short lived. Almost immediately after the result of the vote had been announced, David Cameron, the then Conservative Prime Minister, gave a speech that quickly reignited the feelings of unease that had settled over Unionists in the weeks leading up to the referendum. Within the speech, he conceded new powers to the Scottish parliament at Holyrood (BBC News, 2014). In this speech he also talked about English votes for English laws, the

concept that aims to address the long talked about, much contended, 'West Lothian Question' (Crampton, 2014). When looking at this from the writings of Hobsbawm, this may have been another defining moment for the nation of the United Kingdom and one which has the ability to change the shape of it forever. It was felt by many that this was not the time or the place to be bringing up such things. The Scottish independence referendum can be portrayed as a response to the feeling that the Anglicisation of the Union has dominated the United Kingdom. Why then would anyone wish to raise the question of England's future in answer to Scotland's decision to stay? To discuss the situation of England the day after the referendum result could be viewed as a power play by Westminster. However, it raised some interesting questions about the perceived lack of autonomy which English MPs at Westminster feel they have over issues which impact upon England.

8.5: Conclusion

The United Kingdom, as described in Chapter Two, is a union state comprised of separate nations. This is not a problem, but rather a benefit if only it can be envisaged in this way. It is this integration of both national and regional identities and political institutions that makes the United Kingdom so dynamic and original. This is its strength and it needs to be defended to the best of its ability. Brexit may have the potential to lead to the disintegration of the United Kingdom, but it also has the potential to be its saving grace and to further integrate its component parts in solidarity. As Interviewee 24 (2015) suggests, 'It may be a very different Union, but I don't see it breaking up', showing that within Unionist narrative, the Union is safe from this threat of disintegration. If anything, leaving the European Union provides the United Kingdom with an opportunity to focus on the needs of its component parts and to ensure that a cohesive partnership is developed and promoted across the Union. Developing and promoting a sense of community across the United Kingdom through the use of elective affinity will help to secure the territorial situation, at least for a set moment in time.

A major concern of Unionism that has been discussed within this thesis is that of the fear of not belonging within the United Kingdom (see Chapter Four, section 4.2). Unionists in Ulster are currently in a paradoxical situation where they are both on the periphery of the Union, whilst also having a mainstream position within British politics. They are currently mainstream due to the Conservative Party/Democratic Unionist Party deal of 2017 and the media attention on the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland post-Brexit. Unionists are on the periphery as discussions surrounding the border are drawing a distinction between Northern Ireland and Great Britain and there are questions over whether Northern Ireland is best viewed within Ireland as a whole or within the United Kingdom. In regards to narrative, this is a difficult time for Unionists. They want to be viewed as British by others within the Union and their increased visibility in mainstream British politics helps to promote this. However, Unionists are also in a position where differences between themselves and the United Kingdom are currently more publically pronounced, such as the Irish dimension and the fact that Northern Ireland is the only part of the United Kingdom that shares a land border with a European Union member state. These issues are currently being played out within British (and Irish) politics, and only time will tell what the final outcome will be.

In regards to the future of the Union, it can be defined in terms of both optimism and pessimism. For the Unionists who participated in this research the majority were optimistic about the future of the United Kingdom, but this did not stop them from being pragmatic about the threats which exist within the Union, from Scottish, England and Irish Nationalism to the uncertainties of Brexit and the ongoing process of leaving the European Union. From a narrative perspective, Unionists feel that the Union is secure (as Is their own place within it), but they are not unaware of the difficulties that exist. To return to elective affinity, Unionists do not view their relationship with the Union as being purely instrumental and contractual. Even when the United Kingdom is in a uncertain situation, there is still a strong feeling of affinity that binds Unionists to the Union. The future of the United Kingdom is

uncertain right now as it is taking a bold step into the unknown in regards to Brexit. But this does not have to be the end. In fact, this may only be the beginning.

The next section of this thesis, Part Three, will discuss the questions asked at the start of this process and the answers to them that have been suggested along the way. This will provide a fitting end to our conversation surrounding the paradoxes of Britishness.

Part Three

Concluding reflections

Chapter Nine

Concluding reflections

9.1: Introduction

We have come to the end of our journey into the paradoxes of Ulster Britishness. If anything, one could observe that this thesis incorporates a strong T.S. Eliot flavour in that 'And at the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and to know the place for the first time' (1943). Topics discussed in this thesis may not be new, but it is an original approach providing an academic understanding of the paradoxes of Britishness and Unionism. This thesis set out at the beginning to examine Britishness and Unionism and to ascertain if the two concepts were mutually exclusive, or if they could be understood in a way that allowed the seemingly incompatible paradoxes of each to work together. With the development of the Conservative Party deal with the Democratic Unionist Party following the 2017 General Election, the Ulster Question is now once again central to discussions surrounding both Britishness and the future of the United Kingdom.

Part One observed that Britishness in Northern Ireland has been portrayed in paradoxical terms as being both shared and separate from the Britishness of mainland Great Britain. It proposed five core questions to investigate: What does it mean to be a British citizen? Do *Ulster* Unionists fit this description? What does it mean to have a British identity? Is there an essential core Britishness? Are *Ulster* Unionists experiencing a 'crisis of identity'? (see Chapter Three, section 3.4). By first using a negative reading of Ulster Britishness through an adaptation of some ideas of Schrödinger, Descartes and Baudrillard, this thesis discussed and assessed the traditional anti-Unionist arguments (see Chapter Four, section 4.2). Having done so, the aim was to reconcile these paradoxes through the theoretical framework of elective affinity (see Chapter Four, section 4.3). The elective affinity framework was then tested in Part Two of the thesis by examining the responses of Unionist designated politicians on questions of identity, the 2014 Scottish

independence referendum, the 2016 European referendum and the future of the Union (see Chapters Five to Eight) in order to provide answers to the questions developed within Part One.

When discussing potential limitations of the research project, it is necessary to acknowledge the fact that only Unionist MLAs, MPs and MEPs have been interviewed (Peabody *et al*, 1990). A more generalised approach to Britishness and Unionism in Northern Ireland could have incorporated the views of members from across the Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist community. Instead the decision to focus solely on the views of Unionist elites takes a very specific look at what is a much larger research topic in general. The decision was made on the basis that as politicians are elite actors they should represent the identities of the communities whom they serve and that in return the electorate should defer to their judgement in political decision making (Jennings, 1992: 421; Bullock, 2011: 496; Browning, 1992). The thesis has been based on a top-down approach to the diffusion of identity within Unionism in Northern Ireland as traditionally academic research on Unionism and Britishness in Northern Ireland has been based on a more grassroots approach to identity and belonging exempting the recent study by Tonge *et al* in 2014 on the Democratic Unionist Party. The theory behind the study of elites is that Unionist designated politicians are in a position of power within their communities and therefore have influence over how British identity in Northern Ireland is portrayed and promoted (Fearon and Laitin, 2000). Unionist politicians are the most visual representation of Britishness in Northern Ireland due to their position of power and authority not only within their own communities, but also in Northern Ireland as a whole. Through the elected representatives' mandates and of their own stances and viewpoints, one can observe how representative they are of the overall Unionist community in Northern Ireland. Events such as the Union flag protests of 2011 have shown that Unionist designated politicians may often misjudge and/or lose control of identity within the communities they represent (Silva and Mace, 2015; BBC News, 2013). In this specific scenario members of the loyalist community felt that politicians, and in particular the Democratic Unionist

Party, did not do enough to stand up for their community and for British identity in Northern Ireland (Greenslade, 2013; Norton *et al*, 2017). From the findings gathered for this research political Unionist representatives are in fact representative of the views of the community who they represent, at least in terms of voting patterns and identity.

The limitations of the methodology must be acknowledged. Whilst every attempt has been made by the researcher to minimise any potential bias throughout the interview stage it has to be noted that this can happened within qualitative research (Oppenheim, 2000; Williams, 1964). The very nature of the research methodology itself, namely semi-structured one-on-one interviews, also provides its own limitations to an area of study (Barriball and While, 1994; Gall, Gall and Borg, 2003; Turner, 2010: 755). Whilst the research took measures to address any potential issues with this methodology, it is necessary to observe that it does have limitations. Perhaps the most obvious limitation to the methodology is the questioning of participants identity itself. As outlined in Chapter Five, the very act of asking a participant to define their identity throws the very existence of that identity into doubt, as described within the framework of *Cogito, ergo sum* that has been discussed previously (Descartes, 1969; Chapter Four, section 4.2.2). By questioning what their identity is, the researcher could inadvertently lead the participant to state a stronger version of their own identity in order to defend themselves. Unfortunately there is no way to ascertain if this is the case or not. On the contrary to this scenario, a participant may have stated their identity to be something other than British to present themselves as more progressive and inclusive. During the data collection period for qualitative research the researcher to a degree is at the mercy of the participants as to what answers they receive. As a researcher one would expect to receive the truth as an answer, yet this is not always the case. There is a large degree of trust placed both ways during an interview.

The timescale during which the research was conducted could also be considered to have been a limitation. Due to the nature of the discussions surrounding the European referendum and when it would be held, it is unfortunate that many of the interviews were conducted before the European referendum of 23rd June 2016 had been called (BBC, 2016). For most of the participants their views on a European referendum were based upon pure speculation as at this stage in the discussions and very few of the participants had actually given much consideration to this possible referendum and the possible impact upon the United Kingdom as a whole. After the referendum date was announced, the answers given by the last four participants tended to become more focused and in depth in their structure (see Chapter Seven). For these participants their answers were very much based on how the United Kingdom would now have to move forward from this referendum and how they as elected representatives could ensure that Northern Ireland received the best deal possible. Based upon this, the viewpoints expressed by participants towards the European referendum tended to vary greatly depending on at what stage of the interview process they participated at. As a snap shot of Northern Irish Unionism, being able to see how attitudes changed and developed towards the European referendum and the question of the United Kingdom leaving the European Union can be said to add to academic research into the area of British politics and identity. Whilst this makes the overall data gained throughout the research rich and interesting, it would have been preferable to have had the timeframes of the interviews closer together in order to gain a better insight into this threat to the Union. Of course, any timeframe is problematic. A week certainly is a long time in politics – and the events of the last three years made it very difficult to find a point of interpretative stability. Things changed fast and unexpectedly.

This chapter will review the research findings to analyse both their importance and contribution to our academic understanding of the social identity of Britishness in a contested region of the United Kingdom during this time of constitutional change and political transformation. These findings will then be presented in relation to

the framework of elective affinity and what understanding this brings to the academic study of the paradoxes of Britishness and Unionism. The limitations of the research project will be addressed in order to acknowledge areas upon which future research could improve. This chapter will state how the overall thesis has provided an original contribution to knowledge, before reaching its conclusion by stating what scope this thesis leaves for future research on Britishness and Unionism in Northern Ireland.

9.2: Re-stating the paradoxes

This thesis argues that no research into Britishness is complete without including the viewpoints and opinions of Northern Irish Unionists. Unionists in Northern Ireland deserve to have their voice heard over issues of Britishness, threats to the Union, and the future of the Union. A recurrent theme throughout this thesis has been Richard Rose's idea that Northern Ireland is a test case for the United Kingdom as a state and that it is not peripheral at all to British politics, but central to it (1982). *Ulster* Unionists may be unique when it comes to identity within the United Kingdom, but only in the same way that individuals from England, Scotland and Wales are also unique. The Northern Ireland situation provides an opportunity to study British identity and the future of the Union from the viewpoint of individuals who have a distinct angle of vision on the nature of identity and the Union. Northern Ireland has always been at the edge of the Union and has often in its short history come close to the precipice, with ex-Democratic Unionist Party Leader Peter Robinson stating back in 1991 that the Union was 'finished' (Phoenix, 2017). Yet it is still here today.

This thesis could be described as a follow up to Richard Rose's 1971 book, *Governing without Consensus.* This research makes the case that by uncovering findings similar to those which Rose discovered in 1968 when the study was conducted, this research continues and extends previous academic literature. The

research conducted by Rose was at the beginning of the Troubles, this research by comparison has been conducted almost half a century after Rose's pioneering 1968 study. The question going into this research was, *What has changed*? But in reality what was discovered was that as things have changed, they have also stayed the same - a fitting paradox to result from a study of paradoxes. Much academic literature talks about how the Troubles had the effect of polarising identity within Northern Ireland and it is this period of polarisation that created the hyper version of Britishness in Northern Ireland discussed in the thesis and which is so prevalent even today. It is this period of polarisation which reinforces the old adage that Northern Ireland Unionists wanted to be *as British as Finchley*. Yet what Rose found in 1968 and what this research discovered is a more richly textured Unionist identity. It can therefore be argued, as has been done in Chapter Five, that identity in Northern Ireland is returning to what it once was previous to the Troubles. This is an important contribution to make to academic knowledge surrounding Northern Irish Unionism.

Two core paradoxes of British identity within *Ulster* Unionism have been discussed within Chapter Three, section 3.3. These paradoxes are that *Ulster* Unionist identity is viewed in two contrasting ways: *Ulster* Unionists are either British, but they do not act as though they are; or they are British, but are not accepted as such by the British who actually view them as Irish. To say that *Ulster* Unionists do not act as though they are British raises some interesting questions about what it means to be British and the different interpretations which exist surrounding this. For Miller (1978), *Ulster* Unionists are not British enough to be called so, yet for other political theorists such as McLean and McMillan (2005), *Ulster* Unionists are viewed as being *too British* to truly be British. This is a fascinating, yet confusing paradox to grasp. An attempt was made to resolve this conundrum in section 4.2. The second paradox of Ulster Britishness, that *Ulster* Unionists are not viewed as British by their neighbours in Great Britain, also fits into this negative interpretation of Unionist identity, highlighting the assumption that the fear of belonging has defined the identity of *Ulster* Unionists (see Chapter Four, section 4.2). This thesis tried to

demonstrate that Unionists are not – as a matter of self-understanding - scared of not belonging. Elective affinity was used to explain how that self-understanding functions: that both the shared and separate aspects of Britishness within *Ulster* Unionism actually support each other. It is not enough to simply be a part of the United Kingdom through elections and referendums – though that is important – but that one must also feel an affinity towards the Union in order for the constitutional aspects to hold fast. One must also feel that this affinity is reciprocated by the Union and this has historically been the issue for *Ulster* Unionists. As discussed within Chapter Four, section 4.2, the notion of a 'fear of not belonging' comes from *outside* forces and not from the Unionists themselves.

From these two paradoxes of Britishness emerged five key questions to be answered by the thesis. Chapter Four, section 4.4, sought to provide theoretical answers to these questions before the interviews commenced. The first question, What does it mean to be a British citizen? To say that *Ulster* Unionists are either not British or too British is all well and good, but just what is meant by Britishness must first be clarified. If we look at Britishness through the first of Boyce's distinctions then it is one of political representation. Each of the four component parts of the United Kingdom is represented at Westminster. Devolution does not infringe upon British citizenship, but instead strengthens it by allowing each nation to retain its individuality within the whole. Do *Ulster* Unionists fit within this description of Britishness? To provide a short answer: yes, they do. The United Kingdom is a union state of four distinctive nations which have been brought together through both contractual and instrumental reasons and by a shared sense of self and belonging. This is where Boyce's distinction and Elazar's idea of 'self-rule' and 'shared rule' comes into play (1995; 1987). The United Kingdom only works if it operates on two levels. First, the 'shared rule' level that brings all the nations together through political representation at the national parliament. Second, the 'self-rule' component allows for the three smaller nations of the United Kingdom to have a degree of regional autonomy - in short, allowing the four

component parts of the Union to retain their individuality whilst also being a sum of the whole.

What does it mean to have a British identity? Identity is important. It provides a sense of place and belonging. It also works on a psychological level to define in groups and out groups. Within the United Kingdom, it is the overarching umbrella identity of the United Kingdom that encompasses England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales. But what does it mean for *Ulster* Unionists? For *Ulster* Unionists to have a British identity and to be a part of the United Kingdom is to belong and this sense of belonging is vitally important. The history of *Ulster* Unionism has been one of trying to secure their place and to gain a sense of belonging. It has changed from Irish Unionism which sought to keep Ireland as a whole within the Union during the Home Rule Crisis to Ulster Unionism since the creation of Northern Ireland in 1921. The only constant that has existed is their place within the United Kingdom and at times this position has been severely tested, such as during the Troubles. It is an interesting observation that the British identity means different things to different people and this is where the next question gains its significance.

Is there an 'essential/core' Britishness? In one way, this question can be answered as no. How can there be an essential or core version of Britishness whenever Britishness is different depending on what part of the United Kingdom one is in? It is actually within this paradox that a more complete answer is discovered. Yes there is an essential Britishness present within the United Kingdom, but it is more flexible than may have been previously thought. It is this flexibility and organic nature which is the core of British national identity. There is no one version of Britishness which describes the whole of the United Kingdom. Regional identities in each part of the Union influence Britishness. Britishness in England is not the same as the Britishness that one would see in Northern Ireland and this applies also for Scotland and Wales. This is why Northern Ireland is unique – but paradoxically it

also the same as everywhere else. The reason why Northern Ireland is portrayed as the 'exception' is partly due to the geographical location it holds. A case of out of sight, out of mind as it is separated from Great Britain by the Irish Sea. Another reason is simply that there has been a lack of understanding surrounding the nature of Britishness and how the paradoxical aspects of its nature can be reconciled across the United Kingdom.

Are *Ulster* Unionists experiencing a crisis of identity? Again, to provide a short answer: no. *Ulster* Unionists know who they are. It is other people who do not know what *Ulster* Unionists are. This is partly through lack of understanding. Although that is not to say that issues of doubt and fear of not belonging do not exist, they do. Britishness in Northern Ireland may look different to that which can be seen in Great Britain due to the use of flags, symbols and emblems, but this overt show of Britishness is to affirm to others that Northern Ireland belongs within the Union. Contractual and instrumental arrangements are not enough to secure the Union, there must also be reciprocated feelings of shared identity and belonging in order to strengthen and maintain the United Kingdom. This has tended to be lacking in regards to the relationship between *Ulster* Unionists and Westminster. *Ulster* Unionists promote the Union and give their support and loyalty to it, but they feel as though this relationship is one-sided. This may be resolved in some part by the deal between the Conservative Party and the Democratic Unionist Party following the 2017 General Election as this has raised the profile of *Ulster* Unionism within mainstream British politics and has provided the Democratic Unionist Party with a position of greater power at Westminster effectively making them the 'Queenmakers' of Theresa May's government.

To summarise, Part One addressed the existing literature and the theory behind the paradoxes of Britishness and Unionism and developed questions from this that needed to be answered to provide an understanding of Ulster Britishness. Hypothetical answers to these questions were provided within Chapter Four using

two distinctive theoretical approaches. The first was a negative reading of Ulster Britishness using the concepts of doubt and fear of belonging which are often included within narratives of Unionist identity. The second was a positive approach that used the framework of elective affinity as a method to reconcile the paradoxes of Unionism and Britishness. This will be discussed in detail within section 9.4 of this chapter as this truly is the core of the thesis and as such deserves special consideration on its own. But before one can get to that, Part Two of the thesis must first be discussed in relation to how the interviews with Unionist designated politicians impacted upon the hypothesised answers to the questions of Ulster Britishness as outlined within Part One.

9.3: Re-investigating the paradoxes

Part Two investigated the views and opinions of Unionist designated politicians in regards to the above paradoxes of Britishness and questions of Ulster Britishness to establish if the hypothetical answers provided in Part One had actually grounding within *Ulster* Unionists and their own understanding of identity and the Union. To do justice to the complexity of the paradoxes of Britishness, Part Two was divided into four chapters focusing on *Ulster* Unionist identity, Scotland and the Union, the European referendum and the Union, and the future of the United Kingdom. These chapters will now be revisited to highlight once more the connections between the theoretical framework and the answers of participants.

In Chapter Five, the question of identity was asked of the research participants involved in this study. This was asked in order to provide an answer to the research questions discussed within Part One. What was interesting about these findings was that they corresponded with the view that identity within *Ulster* Unionism cannot be easily categorised into neat little boxes of identity. Instead, what *Ulster* Unionism portrays is a deeply paradoxical multi-faceted approach to identity. Of the thirty-four participants interviewed, only 18% viewed their identity as being solely British. When compared to the findings of Rose's 1968 study this is lower

than the result he obtained which was 39% (1971: 208). One of the most interesting findings in regards to the question of participants' identity was that around 20% did *not* mention Britishness as being a part of their identity. This result was not anticipated as even for those who did not state Britishness as their first preference identity still mentioned it as a component of it. Of the thirty-four participants, only nine viewed Irishness as a part of their identity while four saw their identity as being distinctly Ulster only.

These findings prove the validity of the hypothesised answers that have been provided to the answers in Part One. *Ulster* Unionists are British citizens and this fact cannot be disputed. This is not only the case through the constitutional ties which bind the Union and through instrumental British connections such as representation at Westminster, the National Health Service and holding a British passport. It is also the case because *Ulster* Unionists *feel* themselves to be British citizens. If a United Ireland were to be created tomorrow this may stop *Ulster* Unionists from being constitutional British citizens, but one may argue they would still *feel* British - and would certainly not lose their shared sense of identity and affinity with the United Kingdom. This is what British identity means: it is a way of life. It is a sense of self and a feeling of belonging that cannot be simply switched off. In that sense, there is no crisis of identity within *Ulster* Unionism. If anything, there is a crisis of solidarity within the United Kingdom which must be addressed. This is not just in the case of Northern Ireland and Irish Nationalism. There are the issues of Scottish and English Nationalism to contend with as well as the unknowns of what a post-Brexit United Kingdom could mean for the Union.

As for the paradoxes of Britishness which were discussed in Chapter Three - that *Ulster* Unionists were British but do not act like they are, or that *Ulster* Unionists are British, but are not viewed as such by others within the Union who see them as Irish - it is clear to see that neither of these two suggestions quite hits the nail on the head. Perhaps a better way to phrase Ulster Britishness is the statement: *Ulster*

Unionists are British and they are so in a way that is fitting to their geographical, cultural and constitutional position within the United Kingdom. *Ulster* Unionists do act as though they are British (for they *are* British), but they do so in a style that is fitting for them. This situation is same for individuals within each part of the United Kingdom as each region has its own unique cultures and histories which shape identity. This does not make *Ulster* Unionists different any more than it makes a Unionist from Scotland, England or Wales different. Instead, through the concept of unity through diversity it makes - ironically - the place of *Ulster* Unionists within the Union just like that of everyone else. As for the second statement, that *Ulster* Unionists are British, but are seen as being Irish, this too is not entirely accurate. Yes there are some who believe that Northern Ireland should be a part of a United Ireland and not a part of the United Kingdom, but it is not fitting to say that those in Great Britain see *Ulster* Unionists as Irish. The participants own responses show that *Ulster* Unionists feel as though they are British and they have conviction in this. This raises wider questions of citizenship within the Union and how members of the United Kingdom are taught about the history of each nation. From a Unionist point of view at least, diversity within the Union should not be looked upon as a negative, but as a positive and it needs to be expressed as such.

The question asked in Chapter Six was how the 2014 Scottish independence referendum impacted on the United Kingdom and on how *Ulster* Unionists perceived its effect on the Union. Perhaps one of the most surprising findings to emerge from this chapter was that the participants had very little concern for the effect on Northern Ireland and the constitutional unrest which resulted from them. What is interesting is that they viewed Northern Ireland's position within the Union as secure no matter how these events unfolded – at least at the time of the interviews. This is a unique position for *Ulster* Unionists to be in as traditionally Northern Ireland has always been the region of the United Kingdom most likely to result in the break-up of the Union. The participants did not seem to have many concerns about the aftermath of the Scottish independence referendum on Irish Nationalism, with only five participants discussing Irish Nationalism when giving

their views of the referendum. Scotland was viewed as the overarching threat to the stability of the Union. The concerns of the participants interviewed were not for Northern Ireland's place within the Union, but for the Union as a whole, especially over the perceived lack of effort Westminster is putting into securing and maintaining the Union. Eleven of the participants stated that they had been worried in the lead up to the Scottish independence referendum that Scotland may in fact have voted to leave the Union as there was little done by Westminster to appeal to broad affinities and belonging that connects the Union.

The European referendum provided an interesting dynamic to the interview process as discussed within Chapter Seven. All of the participants were asked for their views on the then upcoming referendum, yet their answers varied greatly depending on the timeframe when the interview took place. At the beginning of the interview stage, a date for the referendum had not yet been set and as a result only four of the interviews were conducted after the referendum had taken place. What this resulted in was 37% of the participants stating they were unsure of how they would vote when the referendum took place. This uncertainly was due to the lack of information that was being provided by Westminster on what could potentially happen to the United Kingdom post-Brexit. *Ulster* Unionism is traditionally Eurosceptic and has always taken a position of opposition to further weakening of the sovereignty of the United Kingdom. What this finding shows is that *Ulster* Unionists are instrumental in their political decisions about Europe. Across the board there was very little affinity and solidarity expressed in regards to Europe. As has been stated previously in this thesis, elective and contractual ties are not enough on their own without the support of a shared sense of belonging between the nations in questions, yet in the case of the European Union even these contractual bonds were not viewed as being particularly beneficial and there is certainly no shared sense of belonging to strengthen them. Yes, the United Kingdom voted to join the European Economic Community in 1975 for the instrumental benefits which this brought, but since then the feeling among the participants was that the European Union has over stepped its boundaries in terms

of what it originally set out to do and that the negatives of this far outweigh any positives. This concept of inverted elective affinity that exists within the relationship between *Ulster* Unionists and the European Union is a sharp contrast to the elective affinity which binds *Ulster* Unionists to the United Kingdom, providing an insight into why one of these unions is still strong, whilst the other is being dissolved.

According to participants, the European Union is a negative in that it takes sovereignty away from the national parliament and for Unionists this most certainly is not a positive. Based upon this, the majority of participants believed that the United Kingdom would be better off out of the European Union. Even the very wording of these answers was interesting in that participants tended to talk about the United Kingdom as a whole, rather than focusing upon Northern Ireland. Again this shows the support of Northern Irish Unionists towards the Union and outlines how much value is placed on the strength of the Union and the importance of keeping the United Kingdom together. In the aftermath of the European referendum Unionist politicians from Northern Ireland, in particular from the Democratic Unionist Party, argued that the people of Northern Ireland should accept the result of the referendum as it was the will of the people of the United Kingdom as a whole (Ainsworth, 2016). This was because Northern Ireland voted to remain in the European Union, whilst the overall result across the United Kingdom was to leave. This is revealing as it shows the importance of the unity of the Union over the will of the people of Northern Ireland. In this scenario, the nation state is more important than one component part by itself, even if it is in regards to something as serious as the nation's future within the European Union. Even with the European Union itself being seen in negative terms, participants felt the need to weigh this up against the risk of the unknowns they would face when outside of the European Union before making their final decision. Whilst 37% is a high percentage of undecided participants, 59% were confident they would vote to leave the European Union. This percentage breakdown of participant attitudes is quite accurate in numbers to the vote of Unionists in Northern Ireland in the referendum

which was estimated to be around 70% in polls leading up to the referendum (White, 2016), again showing the representativeness of Unionist designated politicians in Northern Ireland.

The fact that only one participant viewed the border as an active concern is the most surprising finding to have emerged from Chapter Seven. The lack of discussion on the border is particularly striking given the recent media attention that has been focused on this issue. One may be forgiven for thinking that the border between the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland would be a Northern Irish problem, but it has become a major problem for central British politics. Trade agreements between the United Kingdom and the European Union post-Brexit are now intertwined with the border situation. For this not to be mentioned by participants raises interesting questions. Is this because *Ulster* Unionists are not concerned about the border? Is it because a hard border would potentially benefit *Ulster* Unionists by further securing their territorial position within the United Kingdom? While these are all fascinating potentials, in the case of this thesis it is more plausible that the timing of the interviews in relation to the actual referendum has meant that participants have not looked in detail about the potential consequences of leaving the European Union. This is a finding that would benefit from further research in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the views of *Ulster* Unionists towards the border post-Brexit.

The question of where does the United Kingdom go from here was addressed within Chapter Eight. This chapter analysed the data gathered from interviews to provide an idea of where the participants saw the future of the United Kingdom in the face of the constitutional uncertainty of the previous few years. When asked if they could ever envisage the Union breaking, 67% of the participants said no, while 30% said yes and 3% gave no defined answer. Of those who said that they could envisage the Union breaking, eight said this was because of the risk Scotland and a possible second Scottish independence referendum posed to the United Kingdom.

Two stated the European referendum as a threat to the Union due to the Scottish position on this. Perhaps the most interesting of these findings is that two participants viewed England as the biggest risk to the Union. As the largest region of the United Kingdom, England holds the majority of power in the relationship. If this dynamic was to change then it is possible to see how the Union would struggle to survive. When discussing perceived risks to the Union with all participants, Scottish nationalism remains the largest concern with fifteen participants mentioning it – and not the threat of imminent Irish unity. The European Union comes in second with nine participants, Irish nationalism third with eight participants and England last with two participants raising concerns over it. For the participants interviewed, while they believe the position of Northern Ireland is secure, they still have concerns over the stability of the other regions when it comes to holding the Union together. What does this then mean for the future of British identity within the United Kingdom? It means that it is currently safe, but that the United Kingdom cannot afford to become complacent. The four component parts of the United Kingdom may currently elect to remain within the Union, but the non-instrumental ties which created solidarity are now more important than ever. The United Kingdom is a union state and it needs to ensure that each nation within it is in a reciprocal relationship based on allegiance and shared identity. Participants interviewed believed now is the time to bring the regions of the United Kingdom together in order to try and regain a shared sense of purpose and belonging across the whole of the Union. Due to the unknowns of the United Kingdom leaving the European Union this is now more vital than ever.

These findings have shown that what Richard Rose found in 1968 is still the case in 2017. Though there is almost half a century between these two studies Unionism is still convinced of the value of being British. The next section, 9.4, will be a review of the elective affinity framework and will address how this concept can be used to reconcile the paradoxes of Britishness and Unionism that have been raised throughout this thesis.

9.4: Resolving the paradoxes of Unionism?

In Chapter Four, section 4.3, elective affinity was introduced as a positive interpretation of Ulster Britishness and as a means of addressing the paradoxes of Britishness and Unionism which were discussed within Part One. Elective affinity explained the way interactions in relationships happen and are observed. Within the case of *Ulster* Unionism and Britishness it is used to observe the behaviour of *Ulster* Unionists in regards to both British national identity and in terms of their relationship with Great Britain. This is achieved by taking the paradoxes of allegiance and identity, contract and solidarity and instrumentalism and non-instrumentalism and observing them as partners rather than as separate components of Ulster Britishness. By seeing the paradoxes as positive rather than negative, elective affinity provides an understanding of the United Kingdom that promotes regional diversity within the framework of the union state. This is a vital reading of Unionism and Britishness in the twenty-first century due to devolution and the recent constitutional events that have occurred across the Union.

Relationships within a union state must be examined in two ways: first, as a political relationship, and second, as a social and cultural relationship. Both of these relationships may mean different things to different people, but without both of these aspects working together a union state would not be able to survive. The very fact that the United Kingdom has been in existence for so long, albeit with a few changes such as the loss of Ireland, means that it has been successful in managing these two aspects of Britishness. One aspect of how this has been achieved is the lack of written constitution within the United Kingdom. Although this may be viewed as a negative, it has actually been a positive for the United Kingdom. An uncodified constitution allows for a level of flexibility which is vital in regards to managing the interests of four separate and distinctive nations simultaneously.

What was discovered within the analysis of these findings is that Unionist identity in Northern Ireland can be described as having come full circle in regards to how it is viewed internally. According to Richard Rose in his 1968 study, Northern Irish Unionists had a unique Ulster dimension to their identity, but they were still British. The range of identities mentioned during the interviews as participants' first choice identities, along with the complex and layered multi-identities they described leads one to the conclusion that identity within *Ulster* Unionism has returned to pre-Troubles levels similar to those which Rose found. With Northern Ireland's place in the Union secured through the Principle of Consent, *Ulster* Unionists may no longer feel any doubt towards their position within the United Kingdom due to outside forces doubting that they belong. No one can tell the people of Northern Ireland they do not belong within the Union except for the Northern Irish electorate themselves. What this security does for Ulster Britishness is it allows it to be more fluid and multi-faceted. *Ulster* Unionists now feel as though they can hold multiple identities at once without fearing this will make other people view them as being not British. As a result this brings *Ulster* Unionists into line with Great Britain where individuals can also hold regional identities simultaneously with British national identity.

These findings are also interesting when observed from the viewpoint of the traditional academic typologies of *Ulster* Unionism. These tended to view Unionism as being a highly black and white concept, that a Unionist can only be instrumental or non-instrumental. From the data gathered and analysed for this thesis, it is clear this approach is too simplistic to deal with the complex social identity that is *Ulster* Unionism. This thesis found instead that Unionism contains a massive grey area whereby it is possible to be both instrumental and non-instrumental. It is this finding that connects the concept of elective affinity to that of *Ulster* Unionism. Elective affinity provides a theoretical framework within which *Ulster* Unionism can be simultaneously viewed as being both instrumental and non-instrumental as in reality one of these components could not work within the United Kingdom without the support and backing of the other. It works like a continuing loop: *Ulster*

Unionists feel that they are British and they elect to remain within the United Kingdom for this reason and because they elect to remain within the United Kingdom they feel British. The sense of belonging which underpins the constitutional arrangement for *Ulster* Unionists cannot be overlooked. It is the key to the continued survival as a part of the Union. It is also the difference between *Ulster* Unionists who support the Union and Irish Nationalists who support the Union. Many Irish Nationalists in Northern Ireland support the Union for the instrumental benefits this union provides, but they do not feel any affinity towards the United Kingdom. This is why if a United Ireland was to become a more financially stable alternative, many Irish Nationalists would choose to leave the United Kingdom. For *Ulster* Unionists the perceived instrumental benefits would not outweigh the importance of shared culture and identity, the same reason why Irish Republicans and some Irish Nationalists would always choose to become a part of a United Ireland even if the United Kingdom provided more benefits. That is why the support of Irish Nationalists to the Union is a tricky thing to measure or to depend upon. It is allegiant only so long in that there is instrumental gain and this relationship contains no identity to support it.

Whilst the 2017 deal between the Conservative Party and the Democratic Unionist Party took place after the research stage of this thesis was conducted it remains an important component of the research and one that can be analysed within the context of this section. When focusing on the future of the United Kingdom, the participants themselves did not envisage that Northern Ireland, and in particular *Ulster* Unionists, would have such a major role to play. Having been effectively raised to the position of political queenmakers within Westminster following the result of the 2017 General Election, the Democratic Unionist Party now finds itself at the very core of British politics. This is a marked change from the traditional academic notions of Northern Ireland being a place apart from the rest of the United Kingdom; a problem child that must be kept at arm's length least it should disturb the other regions as well. This deal offered Northern Irish Unionists, apart from an extra £1 billion, the opportunity to reinforce that they are in fact a

necessary component part of the United Kingdom and that they are as British as any of the other Westminster political parties.

What is interesting about the deal between the Conservative Party and the Democratic Unionist Party from an elective affinity viewpoint is the way the British public have reacted to this. There has been somewhat of a negative reaction from the British media surrounding this deal due to the Democratic Unionist Party's stance on moral and social issues such as decriminalising abortion and legalising equal marriage. The Democratic Unionist Party was democratically elected to Westminster as the largest Unionist party from Northern Ireland and the Conservative Party was well within its rights to make a deal with it as the two parties share similar views on the Union and on other key political issues. Yet there appears to be little to no affinity between the Democratic Unionist Party and the population of Great Britain. The style and appearance of the Democratic Unionist Party is alien to the majority of the electorate of Great Britain for the very same reasons that *Ulster* Unionists in general are viewed as either being British, but not acting like they are, or as really being Irish. It is simply because the version of Britishness expressed by the Democratic Unionist Party is overt. There are even those within the Conservative Party themselves who are unhappy with the deal and who see the differences between the two parties as being potentially problematic. For the Democratic Unionist Party and for *Ulster* Unionism in general this deal solidified the position of *Ulster* Unionists within the United Kingdom, allowing them a mainstream position at the heart of British politics in Westminster.

During the interview process participants were asked for their views and opinions on the United Kingdom and of the current political issues such as the Scottish independence referendum, the European referendum, and also of the recent increase in support for English votes for English laws. The responses received from participants were varied, but the results overwhelmingly show there is a concern within Northern Irish unionism over the future of the United Kingdom. The

overwhelming view was not that Northern Ireland's position within the Union is at risk, but rather that it now finds itself one of the most secure regions of the United Kingdom. This in itself is an important finding. If Northern Ireland is now seen as secure within the United Kingdom by the participants interviewed, why then did the Democratic Unionist Party election campaign in 2016, and in particular during the snap election campaign of 2017 (Foster, 2017), noticeably go down a path of arguing that they were the only party in Northern Ireland that was strong enough to secure the Union? Why in 2017, almost 100 years on since the creation of the Northern Irish state, can Unionists still not feel secure in their identity? Why is there still a sense of a community under attack whenever Unionism is still the largest ethno-national group and political group in Northern Ireland? One can see some of the reasoning behind this fragile sense of belonging in the results of the 2017 Assembly Election (The Guardian, 2017). This election cannot be counted as anything other than a disaster for mainstream Unionism. Although Unionism kept its Stormont majority it did so by only one seat, making this the closest election ever in Northern Irish history.

Even though this election could be seen as a wakeup call for Westminster and for Unionism across the United Kingdom it also provided greater benefits than anyone would have foreseen going into it. Even with the gap between Unionist and Nationalist representation at Westminster closing, the minority Conservative government that was returned following the results of the election chose to make a deal with the Democratic Unionist Party in order to secure their power at Westminster. In this deal, the Democratic Unionist Party was able to secure a financial package of over £1 billion for Northern Ireland in return for giving their support to the minority Conservative government during important votes. This reinforced that Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom and that *Ulster* Unionism is core to British politics, albeit because they are needed to prop up the Conservative Party. It reconciles the contract and solidarity tropes within *Ulster* Unionism, as through the deal the Democratic Unionist Party are connected to the heart of the British politics through choice, but it also simultaneously shows and

promotes solidarity between both Northern Ireland and Great Britain, and *Ulster* Unionist and Westminster politics.

Overall, out of the participants interviewed for the thesis, the majority felt that although the Scottish independence referendum was a closer result than expected, it does not affect the place of Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom. Many participants talked about the possibility of how it could have impacted Northern Ireland if Scotland had left the United Kingdom. In this scenario, a newly independent Scotland could have led to increased support within Northern Ireland for Irish Nationalism and ultimately led to calls for a border poll. However, it is necessary to state that Irish Nationalism has strong support on its own even without Scottish Nationalism. Had this hypothetical border poll been successful Northern Ireland could have found itself as part of a United Ireland. This was, and will continue to be, a nightmare scenario for Northern Irish Unionists. Many of the participants stated that although the result should be taken as a positive that does not mean that the United Kingdom can afford to be complacent. This referendum was extremely close, too close for comfort from the viewpoint of Unionists in Northern Ireland. What needs to happen now is that Unionism across the United Kingdom unites to work together to promote the benefits of the Union in order to prevent a similar event from happening in the future.

Elective affinity, as outlined within this thesis, provides a framework for better understanding of the complexities of the paradoxes of Ulster Britishness. This concept allows for the reconciliation of the seemingly contradictory paradoxes of allegiance and identity, contract and solidarity and instrumentalism and non-instrumentalism which define the relationship between Britishness and *Ulster* Unionism. What elective affinity does and does well is that it highlights the importance of both the elective choice of *Ulster* Unionists to be a part of the Union, whilst simultaneously highlighting the importance of affinity and belonging to the United Kingdom. Throughout this thesis it has been observed that neither aspect of

Britishness can hold the United Kingdom together by itself, they are two parts of the one whole and must be treated as so. To view Ulster Britishness through a framework of elective affinity is to state definitively that *Ulster* Unionists are British and are an important component part of the United Kingdom that is central and not peripheral to British politics.

9.5: Conclusion

To complete the thesis, we have returned to the start, but with a newfound knowledge of where we came from. Unionist Britishness in Northern Ireland can now be described as having returned to pre-Troubles levels when one examines the findings of both this thesis and the 2015 Northern Ireland Life and Times survey and compares them to Richard Rose's 1968 study. This is significant as it shows that other identities within *Ulster* Unionism are flourishing, something only achievable when Northern Ireland's place within the Union is secure. From the findings one can observe that for *Ulster* Unionists, Northern Ireland is no longer the biggest threat to the Union and that this title lies with the recent constitutional unrest across the United Kingdom, courtesy of the 2014 Scottish independence referendum and the 2016 European referendum. Britishness as an identity is having to work hard in the face of constitutional upheaval which threatens the very structures that bind the United Kingdom together. As outlined throughout this thesis, identity on its own cannot work to save or maintain the Union. There must also be an elected or instrumental arrangement which binds the regions together. This is why Unionists interviewed felt that Northern Ireland's place within the Union is secured. The Principle of Consent, coupled with the fact we are now nineteen years on from the 1998 Good Friday Agreement allowed *Ulster* Unionists when the interviews took place - to be secure in the knowledge their position within the Union is protected. *Ulster* Unionism is complex, but so is every other regional identity within the United Kingdom. What it truly needs is to be accepted as British by those within Great Britain and to be accepted as a core component of Britishness.

Elective affinity can and has provided us with a framework through which to obtain a better understanding of the complexities of the relationships which exist between the regions of the United Kingdom. This approach does not exclude or find problems with regional diversity. On the contrary, it welcomes and views it as a necessary component within a union state. This is key to the continuation of the United Kingdom. Each region must *elect* to remain as part of the Union, but must also cement this constitutional contract with a shared sense of *affinity* and belonging to the nation-state as a whole. The people of Scotland have elected to remain as part of the United Kingdom, but the concerns of the participants of this research have expressed must be done to ensure a sense of solidarity and belonging is prevalent across the Union. Whether this is a sense of complacency or not, it must be addressed at Westminster involving all of the regions of the United Kingdom.

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Appendix One – Ulster University ethics form

UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER RESEARCH GOVERNANCE

RG1a APPLICATION TO UNDERTAKE RESEARCH ON HUMAN SUBJECTS

PLEASE REFER TO THE NOTES OF GUIDANCE BEFORE COMPLETING THIS FORM. (Available from the Research Governance website at http://www.ulster.ac.uk/research/rg/)

All sections of this form must be completed (use minimum font size 11). If the form is altered in any way it will be returned unconsidered by the Committee.

This form should be used for research in categories A, B and D

Do not use this form for research being conducted in collaboration with the NHS/HPSS (category C).

SECTION A

Chief Investigator	Professor Arthur Aughey
Title of Project	Ulster Unionism and the United Kingdom: a relationship in transition?
Student and course (if applicable)	Marion Ashleigh Rebecca Perry, PhD
Additional Investigators	Dr Kirk Simpson

Declaration - Chief Investigator:

I confirm that

- this project meets the definition for research in category* ***(please insert)*** A
- this project is viable and is of research or educational merit;
- all risks and ethical and procedural implications have been considered;
- the project will be conducted at all times in compliance with the research description/protocol and in accordance with the University's requirements on recording and reporting;
- this application has not been submitted to and rejected by another committee; and
- Permission has been granted to use all copyright materials including questionnaires and similar instruments

Signed: A Perry **Date: 17th June 2015**

Once complete, this application and all associated materials must be submitted for peer review

***In addition, you should complete form RG1d for all category D research and form RG1e for both category B and D research**

Peer Review

- *Those conducting peer review should complete form RG2 and attach it to this form (RG1). RG1, RG2 and all associated materials should then be returned to the Chief Investigator.*
- *Depending upon the outcome of peer review, the Chief Investigator should arrange to submit to the Filter Committee, resubmit the application for further review or consider a new or substantially changed project. The application must not be submitted to the Filter Committee until the peer review process has been completed (except as permitted below)*
- ***Please note that peer review can be conducted by the Filter Committee if time and capacity allow.** This is at the discretion of the Chairperson of each Filter Committee and is subject to change.*

Filter Committee

- *The application must be considered by the Filter Committee in accordance with the requirements of the University*
- *The Filter Committee should complete form RG3 and write to the Chief Investigator indicating the outcome of its review*
- *Depending upon the outcome of the Filter Committee review, the Chief Investigator should arrange to proceed with the research OR submit to the University's Research Ethics Committee OR resubmit the application for further review OR consider a new or substantially changed project*
- *The Filter Committee should retain a complete set of original forms.*

SECTION B

1. Where will the research be undertaken?

Stormont and in political constituency offices in Northern Ireland

2. a. What prior approval/funding has been sought or obtained to conduct this. research? Please also provide the UU cost centre number if known

DEL studentship

b. Please indicate any commercial interest in/sponsorship of the study

NA

3. Duration of the Project

Start: September 2014	End: October 2017	Duration: 3 years

4. Background to and reason(s) for the Project

Please provide a brief summary in language comprehensible to a lay person or non-expert. Full details must be provided in the description/protocol submitted with this application (see Notes of Guidance)

The United Kingdom is undergoing significant process of constitutional change. This has been called a process of 'Ever Looser Union' which will impact on each part of the United Kingdom. Much of the academic research on Ulster Unionism has often been concerned with the issue of British identity and sub-categories of it, for example Ulster Loyalist and British Unionist. While interesting and suggestive, this research intends to go beyond those categories of identity to examine a fundamental political question which has been asked by academics in Great Britain: what is the United Kingdom for in the 21st century? Unionist representatives are at the heart of this debate but their views have not been systematically examined. This thesis will address that gap.

5. Aims of the Project

Please provide a brief summary in language comprehensible to a lay person or non-expert. Full details must be provided in the description/protocol submitted with this application (see Notes of Guidance)

This research will investigate how elected Unionist representatives understand the implications of these constitutional changes for Northern Ireland and its relationship with the rest of the United Kingdom. The purpose is to assess the state of Unionist political thinking on a range of relevant matters – constitutional, political, financial etc. – and to map that assessment onto views about Northern Ireland's place within the Union. The research will also examine if there is a common sense of Britishness which continues to bind the regions of the United Kingdom together. Three general areas will be explored under the general headings of identity (of Unionist representatives), engagement (with constitutional change) and relationship (of Northern Ireland to this process of change).

6. Procedures to be used
a. Methods

Please provide a brief summary in language comprehensible to a lay person or non-expert. Full details must be provided in the description/protocol submitted with this application (see Notes of Guidance)

A review of the previous academic literature on this topic has been undertaken from September 2014 to March 2015.

The next stage is that of data collection and semi-structured one-on-one interviews have been chosen as the method for this. This form of interviews has been chosen as it is the best method of gaining large amounts of qualitative data from political elites regarding their own experiences of identity and how this has shaped their political convictions. Semi-structured one-on-one interviews also allow the researcher the flexibility to follow up on any lines of enquiry discovered during the interview process which had not been previously anticipated.

b. Statistical techniques
Please provide details of the statistical techniques to be used within the project description/protocol (see Notes of Guidance)

7. Subjects:

a. How many subjects will be recruited to the study (by group if appropriate)?

Unionist designated Members of European Parliament (MEP)	2
Unionist designated Members of Parliament (MP)	11
Unionist designated Members of Legislative Assembly (MLA)	55

b. Will any of the subjects be from the following vulnerable groups -

	YES	NO
Children under 18		x
Adults with learning or other disabilities		x
Very elderly people		x
Healthy volunteers who have a dependent or subordinate relationship to investigators		x
Other vulnerable groups		x

If YES to any of the above, please specify and justify their inclusion

N/A

c. Inclusion and exclusion criteria
Please indicate, with reasons, the inclusion criteria for the project

All unionist designated MEPs, MPs and MLAs in Northern Ireland. This criteria has been chosen to give an in-depth examination of how British identity influences political elites within Northern Ireland.

Please indicate, with reasons, any exclusion criteria for the project

Unionist designated councillors and all non-unionist designated political elites in Northern Ireland have been excluded as the scope of the research would have been too large for the timescale available.

d. Will any inducements be offered? If 'Yes', please describe

N/A

e. Please describe how and where recruitment will take place

The political representatives chosen for this study – MPs, MEPs and MLAs - will be contacted directly by the researcher. This will be done via email. After the initial contact, a subsequent email will be sent which will include a project description, a subject information sheet and a consent form. The political parties involved in this research will also be contacted to ask for their help in encouraging recruitment. Follow up emails and/or phone calls will be made to those who have not responded to the initial contact.

8. Ethical implications of the research

The researcher is aware of the Ulster University ethics guidelines for research. As the research is based on a non-sensitive topic involving non-vulnerable participants, it is not anticipated that there will be any ethics implications during the course of this research.

9. Could the research identify or indicate the existence of any undetected healthcare concern?

Yes [ ] **No** [x]

If **Yes**, please indicate what might be detected and explain what action will be taken (e.g. inform subject's GP)

N/A

10. Risk Assessment **

Please indicate any risks to subjects or investigators associated with the project

As the research will be examining a non-sensitive topic involving non-vulnerable participants, the risks associated with this study are unlikely.

The risks which may be involved with this research are that of risks which can be associated with conducting semi-structured one-on-one interviews.

Another possible risk that may emerge is that of the participants' anonymity being compromised.

As the level of risk for this research is low, it is anticipated that the benefits to our academic understanding of Britishness gained from this study will far outweigh any risks.

****If you wish, you can use form RG1c – Risk Assessment Record (available from the Research Governance website) to help you assess any risks involved**

11. Precautions

Please describe precautions to be taken to address the above

With the use of semi-structured one-on-one interviews, measures will be taken to ensure that any risks emerging from this will be kept to a minimum. All participants will complete a consent form prior to the interviews taking place. All participants are free to withdraw their consent and leave the study at any time up until the submission of the thesis. The interviews will then take place in public areas of work, such as Stormont or constituency offices, for the benefit of both the participants and the researcher. Prior to interviews, the researcher will contact supervisors to let them know where she is, who she is with and what time she is expected to finish at. The researcher will then contact supervisors after leaving the interview.

In order to protect the anonymity of participants, code names will be given to each participant. However, due to the high profile nature of the participants and the sample size, it may be that individuals are able to draw conclusions as to the identity of some participants. All measures will be taken to limit this possibility.

12. Consent form

It is assumed that as this study is being conducted on human subjects, an information sheet and associated consent form will be provided. A copy of the information sheet and form must be attached to this application. See Notes of Guidance.

If a consent form is not to be used, please provide a justification:

N/A

13. Care of personal information

Please describe the measures that will be taken to ensure that subjects' personal data/information will be stored appropriately and made available only to those named as investigators associated with the project.

Under the Data Protection Act, all information will be securely stored. Raw data will be filled in a secure locked cabinet on premise at the Ulster University. All processed data will be stored on the Ulster University computer system on a password protected computer, with copies saved to the Cloud, an external hard drive and a password protected pen drive.

14. Copyright

Has permission been granted to use all copyright materials including questionnaires and similar instruments?

Yes [ ] **No** [x]

If No, please provide the reason

N/A

Once you have completed this form you should also complete form RG1d for all category D research and form RG1e for both category B and D research

UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER **RESEARCH GOVERNANCE**

RG3 Filter Committee Report Form

Project Title	Ulster Unionism and the United Kingdom: a relationship in transition?
Chief Investigator	Professor Arthur Aughey (Ashleigh Perry, PhD student)
Filter Committee	School of Criminology, Politics and Social Policy and School of Law

This form should be completed by Filter Committees for all research project applications in categories A to D (*for categories A, B, and D the University's own application form – RG1a and RG1b – will have been submitted; for category C, the national, or ORECNI, application form will have been submitted).

Where substantial changes are required the Filter Committee should return an application to the Chief Investigator for clarification/amendment; the Filter Committee can reject an application if it is thought to be unethical, inappropriate, incomplete or not valid/viable.

Only when satisfied that its requirements have been met in full and any amendments are complete, the Filter Committee should make one of the following recommendations:

The research proposal is complete, of an appropriate standard and is in

- category A and the study may proceed* [x]
- category B and the study must be submitted to the University's Research Ethics Committee** Please indicate briefly the reason(s) for this categorisation [ ]

  [ ]
- category C and the study must be submitted to ORECNI along with the necessary supporting materials from the Research Governance Section*** [ ]
- category D and the study must be submitted to the University's Research Ethics Committee** [ ]

Signed: A Mare Stacy 27/07/15

***The application form and this assessment should now be returned to the Chief Investigator. The Filter Committee should retain a copy of the complete set of forms.**

** **The application form and this assessment should now be returned to the Chief Investigator so that he/she can submit the application to the UUREC via the Research Governance section. The Filter Committee should retain a copy of the complete set of forms for their own records.**

***** The application form and this assessment should now be returned to the Chief Investigator so that he/she can prepare for application to a NRES/ORECNI committee. The Filter Committee should retain a copy of the complete set of forms for their own records.**

For all categories, details of the application and review outcome should be minuted using the agreed format and forwarded to the Research Governance section

Please complete the following

The application should be accompanied by an appropriate and favourable Peer Review Report Form (if not, the Filter Committee should be prepared to address this as part of its review). Please comment on the peer review (include whether or not there is evidence that the comments of the peer reviewers have been addressed).

The application was accompanied by favourable peer review.

Please provide an assessment of all component parts of the application, including questionnaires, interview schedules or outline areas for group discussion/unstructured interviews.

The aim of the study is explicit and clear. The study is well located in the context of existing research. The use of semi-structured interviews is appropriate for the study. The sampling method is appropriate. Areas to be discussed with participants are appropriate and in keeping with the aim and objectives of the study.

Please comment on the consent form and information sheet, in particular the level of language and accessibility.

The participant information sheet provides is concise and jargon free. The consent form is appropriate and the language is accessible.

Please comment on the qualifications of the Chief and other Investigators.

The Chief Investigator is well qualified to conduct the research. He has a track record of research and publications in this area of work. Ms Perry is conducting the research as part of her PhD project and is appropriately qualified to do so.

Please comment on the risks present in conducting the study and whether or not they have been addressed.

Risk to the researcher and participants has been categorised as low and the Filter Committee agrees with the assessment. Potential risks, for example, with regard to protection of anonymity, have been identified and addressed.

Please indicate whether or not the ethical issues have been identified and addressed.

Ethical implications have been discussed and addressed.

Please comment on whether or not the subjects are appropriate to the study and the inclusion/exclusion criteria have been identified and listed

Proposed participants are appropriate to the study and inclusion/exclusion criteria has been justified.

UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER

RESEARCH GOVERNANCE

UU Ref No:

Form RG6 **Notification of a proposed substantial amendment**

Chief Investigator: Prof Cathy Gormley-Heenan
Prof Arthur Aughey

Approved Study Title:

Ulster Unionism and the United Kingdom: a relationship in transition?

New/Amended Title (if appropriate):

N/A

Type of Amendment (please indicate any that apply):

- Amendment to application form [x]
- Amendment to description/protocol [ ]
- Amendment to the information sheet/consent or other supporting information [ ]

Please submit the appropriate amended documentation in each case, ensuring that new text is highlighted to enable comparison with the previous version to be made.

Summary of Changes:

To extend the fieldwork period from August 2016 until the end of November 2016. This proposed change to the timeframe is to enable the researcher to reach a set number of interviews.

Summary of Changes (continued):

Additional ethical considerations:

The extension of the fieldwork period does not have any ethical implications.

List of enclosed documents:

N/A

Declaration:

I confirm that the information in this form is accurate and that implementation of the proposed amendment will benefit the study appropriately.

Signed ..... 13/9/16 Date 19/09/2016
(Chief Investigator)

Filter Committee Decision

This amendment:

is appropriate to the needs of the study, is in category A and should be implemented [ ]
is appropriate to the needs of the study, is in category B and should be considered by the University REC [ ]
is NOT appropriate and should be reconsidered or withdrawn [ ]

Signed .....
(Chair of Filter Committee)

Date .....

Summary of Changes (continued):

Additional ethical considerations:

The extension of the fieldwork period does not have any ethical implications.

List of enclosed documents:

N/A

Declaration:

I confirm that the information in this form is accurate and that implementation of the proposed amendment will benefit the study appropriately.

Signed ..... 13/9/16 Date 19/09/2016
(Chief Investigator)

Filter Committee Decision

This amendment:

is appropriate to the needs of the study, is in category A and should be implemented [ ]
is appropriate to the needs of the study, is in category B and should be considered by the University REC [ ]
is NOT appropriate and should be reconsidered or withdrawn [ ]

Signed .....
(Chair of Filter Committee)

Date .....

Appendix Two – Project description for participants

Project Description

Title:

Ulster Unionism and the United Kingdom: a relationship in transition?

Background to the research:

The United Kingdom is undergoing a significant process of constitutional change. This has been called by the Institute for Government (Paun and Munro: 2015) in a recent report a process of 'Ever Looser Union' which will impact on each part of the United Kingdom. Much of the academic research on Ulster Unionism has often been concerned with the issue of British identity and sub-categories of it, for example Ulster Loyalist and British Unionist. However, Farrington and Walker (2009: 135) have argued that 'the study of national identities … has been disconnected from the study of British national identity' especially in Northern Ireland. Tonge et al (2014: 110-128), for example, only briefly discuss this issue within their recent book *The Democratic Unionist Party: From Protest to Power*. While studies of identity are interesting and suggestive, this research intends to go beyond categories of identity in order to examine a fundamental political question which has been asked by academics in Great Britain: what is the United Kingdom for in the 21st century? Unionist representatives are at the heart of this debate but their views have not been systematically examined. The research will also consider a further question: is there still a common sense of Britishness binding together the United Kingdom (Curtice 2006: 96).

Aims of the research:

This research will investigate how elected Unionist representatives understand the implications of these constitutional changes for Northern Ireland and its relationship with the rest of the United Kingdom. In particular it aims to:

- To investigate the thoughts of elected Unionist representatives on the state of the United Kingdom today and their judgement of those issues which will influence its future. These issues include, for example, Scotland, further devolution, the English Question, and the European Union Referendum

- To investigate how elected Unionist representatives understand the implications of these constitutional changes for Northern Ireland and its relationship with the rest of the United Kingdom.

The research will assess the state of political thinking on the Union and map that assessment onto views about Northern Ireland's place within the Union.

Three general areas will be explored under the general headings of identity (of Unionist representatives), engagement (with constitutional change) and relationship (of Northern Ireland to this process of change). The questions proposed by the research represent a current gap within academic writing on Unionism in Northern Ireland.

Methodology:

After desk-based research, interviews have been identified as a key methodology. Semi-structured one-on-one interviews have been chosen to allow the researcher to accumulate all attainable qualitative data relating to the chosen subject. Furthermore, semi-structured interviews will allow the researcher to follow similar lines of questioning in each interview, whilst providing an option to deviate from set questions to follow new lines of enquiry the researcher may not have previously considered or been aware of. Partaking in interviews is a comprehensive method of gathering opinions and allows for a wider selection of organisations and individuals in Northern Ireland to have an input into the research.

At this point in the research it is necessary to note that pre-assumptions of the direction and outcome of the research based on the researchers own background has been considered and steps have been taken to minimise this. Due to the nature of social science research and a conscious decision by the researcher to limit any bias, all research areas and questions have arisen directly from gaps in the previous academic literature on this topic.

All unionist designated political elites from Northern Ireland will be invited to participate in the research process. Based on the nature of the research, sixty-seven interviews have been allocated for. All unionist designated Members of European Parliament (MEPs), Members of Parliament (MPs) and Members of Legislative Assembly (MLAs) have been chosen to participate in order to provide an in-depth examination of how British identity influences political elites within Northern Ireland. The researcher has chosen to exclude all unionist designated councillors and all non-unionist designated political elites within Northern Ireland as it was felt the if these groups were included that the scope of the research would be too large for the timescale available.

Recruitment for this research will be conducted by the researcher. The political elites chosen for this study will be contacted directly by the researcher via email. After the initial contact a subsequent email will be sent which will include a project description, a subject information form and a consent form. The political parties representing the political elites involved in this research will also be contacted to ask for their help in encouraging recruitment. Follow up emails and phone calls will be made to political elites who have not responded to the initial contact.

The researcher is aware of the Ulster University ethics guidelines for research, especially that which includes human participants. As the research is based on a non-sensitive topic and full disclosure will be given to all participants it is not anticipated that there will be any ethical issues during the course of the research.

As with ethical implications, any risks associated with this study are unlikely. The risks which may be involved with this research are that of the risks which can be associated with conducting semi-structured one-on-one interviews. As the level of risk for this research is low, it is anticipated that the benefits to our academic understanding of Britishness gained from this study will far outweigh any risks. However, methods will be taken to ensure that any risks emerging from the use of semi-structured one-on-one interviews will be kept to a minimum. All participants will complete a consent form prior to the interviews taking place and they are free to withdraw their participation up until the point of submission. The interviews will then take place in public areas of work, such as Stormont or constituency offices, for the benefit of both the participants and the researcher. Prior to the interviews, the research will contact supervisors to let them know where they are, who they are with and at what time they are expected to finish at. The researcher will then contact supervisors after leaving the interview. Another possible risk that may emerge is that of the participants' anonymity being compromised. In order to protect the anonymity of participants, code names will be given to each participant. However, due to the high profile nature of the participants and the sample size, it may be that individuals are able to draw conclusions as to who the participants are. All measures will be taken to limit this

Data Analysis:

During the interview process, data will be collected using audio recording and hand written notes taken during the interviews. The data will then be analysed via NVivo in order to discern shared themes throughout the separate interviews.

Under the Data Protection Act, all information will be stored securely. Raw data will be filled in a secure locked cabinet on premises at the Ulster University. All processed data will be stored on the Ulster University computer system on a password protected one user computer, with copies saved to the Cloud, an external hard drive and a password protected pen drive.

Resources:

The resources available for this research are as follows:

Human resources:

- Contacts with unionist representatives from a range of political parties in Northern Ireland

Physical resources:

- NVivo system for analysing the data
- Secured filling cabinet for data storage
- Password protected computer, an external hard drive and a password protected pen drive for data storage
- Transportation to interviews

References:

Curtice, J., (2006), 'A Stronger or Weaker Union? Public Reactions to Asymmetric Devolution in the United Kingdom', *Publius,* 36:1, 95-114

Farrington, C. and Walker, G., (2009), 'Scotland, Northern Ireland and Devolution: Past and Present', *Contemporary British History,* 24:2, 235-256

Paun, A and Munro, R (2015) *Governing in an Ever Looser Union,* London: Institute for Government.

Tonge, J., Braniff, M., Hennessey, T., McAuley, J. W. and Whiting, S., (2014), *The Democratic Unionist Party: From Protest to Power,* Oxford: Oxford University Press

Appendix Three – Participant recruitment letter and participant information

Dear

My name is Ashleigh Perry and I am a PhD candidate at Ulster University. I am writing to invite you to participate in my PhD study, 'Ulster Unionism and the United Kingdom: a relationship in transition?' This document contains further information on the aims of the research project and also what your role as an interviewee would entail.

The United Kingdom is undergoing significant process of constitutional change. The Institute for Government in London has called this a process of 'Ever Looser Union'. The aims of the study are as follows:

- To investigate your thoughts, as an elected Unionist representative, on the state of the United Kingdom today and your judgement of the issues which will influence its future, for example Scotland, further devolution, the English Question, and the European Union Referendum
- To investigate how you, as an elected Unionist representative, understand the implications of these constitutional changes for Northern Ireland and its relationship with the rest of the United Kingdom

As an elected politician who not only represents public opinion but also helps to form it, you are invited to take part in this study via an interview. Each interview will take place at a location convenient to the participant. Participant confidentiality will be protected – every effort will be made to ensure it is impossible to identify individual interviewees from the material used in the thesis or in any other publication. All personal data will be securely held in accordance with Ulster University policies. Participation is voluntary and you would remain free to withdraw permission even after giving an interview.

If you have any further questions about the project, please do not hesitate to contact me by email (perry-a2@email.ulster.ac.uk) or telephone (02890368243). Alternatively, you can contact the chief investigator Professor Arthur Aughey (a.aughey@ulster.ac.uk / 028 90366659). Due to the timescale of the research, it would be greatly appreciated if you could contact me by the 30th September in order to arrange an interview time.

Thank you for your time. I look forward to discussing the project with you further.

Ashleigh Perry
PhD candidate
Enc

Information for participants

Project: Ulster Unionism and the United Kingdom: a relationship in transition?
Researcher: Ashleigh Perry (PhD candidate, School of Criminology, Politics and Social Policy, Ulster University)
Supervisory team: Professor Arthur Aughey and Dr Kirk Simpson

About the research

What is the purpose of the research?

This research is investigating the changing United Kingdom and how that change is understood by Unionist elected representatives. The purpose is to assess the state of Unionist political thinking on a range of relevant matters – constitutional, political, financial etc – and to map that assessment onto views about Northern Ireland's place within the Union.

Why is this project important?

Much of the academic research on Ulster Unionism has often been concerned with the issue of British identity and sub-categories of it, for example Ulster Loyalist and British Unionist. While interesting and suggestive, this research intends to go beyond those categories of identity to examine a fundamental political question which has been asked by academics in Great Britain: what is the United Kingdom for in the 21st century? In other words, how does the Union function today and can diversity be reconciled with unity? Unionist representatives are at the heart of this debate but their views have not been systematically examined. This thesis will address that gap.

What is my contribution?

As an elected representative, your contribution will play a vital role in this research. Your reflections on the changing Union – and Northern Ireland's place within it – will allow the researcher to test models and theories of the United Kingdom. It will also capture an accurate assessment of the current 'state of mind' of Unionism in Northern Ireland.

What risks are involved and how will I be protected?

Confidentiality is an important factor in any research and all interviews conducted will be confidential. Secure storage of personal data, including the attached consent form, and protection of the anonymity of interviewees to the maximum extent possible will be treated as a matter of utmost importance. All work is conducted in accordance with the code of practice and data protection policy of the Ulster University.

Contact

Ashleigh Perry (PhD candidate) - perry-a2@email.ulster.ac.uk / 028 90368132
Professor Arthur Aughey (chief investigator) - a.aughey@ulster.ac.uk / 028 90366659

Appendix Four – Consent form

Consent form

Project: Ulster Unionism and the United Kingdom: a relationship in transition?

Researcher: Ashleigh Perry

Chief investigator: Professor Arthur Aughey

Second supervisor: Dr Kirk Simpson

Completion of this form indicates the signatory's consent to take part in the above named PhD research project being conducted at the School of Criminology, Politics and Social Policy, Ulster University.

Research participant's declaration (please tick boxes):

I confirm that I have been given and have read and understood the information sheet [ ]
For the above study and have asked and received answers to any questions raised

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any [ ]
time without giving a reason and without my rights being affected in any way

I understand that the researchers will hold all information and data collected securely [ ]
and in confidence and that all efforts will be made to ensure that I cannot be identified as a participant in the study (except as might be required by law) and I give permission for the researchers to hold relevant personal data

I agree to take part in the study [ ]

_____	_____
Signature	Signature of person taking consent
_____	_____
Print name	Print name
_____	_____
Date	Date

Appendix Five – Interview questions

Hello… Thank you for agreeing to take part in this interview. This study aims to look at the identity of Unionist designated politicians and how this impacts on their view of the United Kingdom. Today I'll be asking you questions about your identity and politics, your thoughts on current events happening within the UK, and also your opinion on the future of the Union.

Introduction questions:

The first few questions I'm going to ask are about your identity and about how you became involved in politics.

1. Your political designation is Unionist, but how would you define your identity?
    - Can you explain a little more about what you mean by …?
    - How do you view yourself as a unionist?
2. How long have you been involved in politics?
3. How did you become interested in politics?
4. What are your key political values?
    - Have you always felt strongly about this?
5. Why did you join your party?
    - Do you feel that the party has changed over time?
6. It has been asked what does the UK means in the 21st century. What is your answer to that?
    - How do you feel about this?
    - Have your views on the Union changed over time?

The next questions will be based on current events happening within the UK and will be divided into three sections looking at the political, social and economic union between NI and the UK. In the first section on political union, I will ask you for your views on a section of current issues within British politics, such as the current debate on EU, and how you believe this to be impacting upon NI's relationship with GB.

Political union

1. What are your views on the possibility of a constitutional convention?
    - What impact do you think this might have on NI?
    - Why?
    - Can you give examples?
2. What is your opinion of EVEL?
    - How do you think this will affect the union?
3. What were your opinions of the Scottish referendum?
    - What impact could this have on NI?
    - Do you think that it is a possibility in the future?
4. What do you believe will happen if there is an EU referendum?
    - Why?
    - Could you give examples?
    - Does being a member of the EU impact on your identity?
5. Is there a limit to the amount of devolution NI can receive?
    - Can you explain a little more about what you mean by…?
    - How would this impact on the union?
    - How would this affect relationships between NI and Westminster?

The next few questions are on the social union of the UK. In this section I'm going to ask you how close you feel that NI is to the rest of the UK and whether you feel that NI is a valued member of the UK. This will cover areas such as what are common symbols of Britishness and what does British citizenship mean to you?

Social union

1. How close do you feel that NI is to GB?
    - Why?
    - Could you provide an example?
2. For you, what are common symbols of Britishness?
    - How closely do you feel that this represents you?
    - As a NI unionist, how closely does this represent you?
    - How/What would you change?

3. Would you like NI to have more importance in perspectives of Britishness?
    - How could this be achieved?
4. What does being a citizen of the UK mean to you?
    - Can you elaborate on …?
    - Why?
    - Do you feel like a fully-fledged citizen of the UK?
    - What has your personal experience been?
5. Have there been any experiences which have made you feel that NI is apart from the UK as a whole?
    - Can you give examples?
    - How would you change this?

So we are now going to look at the economic union between NI and the UK. These questions will ask for your opinions on how financial issues such as the current debates on welfare reform and lowering corporation tax will affect NIs place within the UK.

<u>Economic union</u>

1. What are your thoughts on Welfare reform?
    - Why?
2. What are your thoughts on the plan to lower corporation tax in NI?
    - How would this affect NIs place within the Union?
3. Is there greater scope for economic autonomy within NI?
    - If so, what implications does this have for other devolved regions?
    - How would this affect relations with Westminster?

Finally, I am going to ask your opinion on a few questions about the future of the Union and how you see the UK progressing.

<u>Final questions:</u>

1. It has been suggested from the 1970s that the Union will break.
    - Can you envisage the Union breaking?

- How do you feel about this?

2. Leaving the EU?
    - What would a non-EU UK look like?
    - What do you think of Nicola Sturgeon's suggestion that each region of the UK should be allowed a separate referendum on leaving the EU?
    - Would this strengthen or weaken the Union?
    - Why?
3. Scottish independence?
    - Do you think that this could lead to a united Ireland?
    - Why?
4. It has been said that we are no longer a union state, but a state of nations. What do you think about this?
    - Why?
    - Can you provide examples?

Thank you very much for your time. Do you have any further comments you would like to add?